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THE CONCEPTS OF SIN IN THE THOUGHT OF KARL BARTH
AND REINHOLD NIEBUHR, AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF
THESE CONCEPTS IN PASTORAL COUNSELING

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Doctor of Religion

by
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PREFACE

The concept of sin has traditionally played a vital role in Christian theology. Indeed, it is only against the background of man's sinfulness that the Good News of God's forgiving, justifying grace takes on meaning and power. But in the last two centuries there has been a strong movement away from the concept of sin in Western culture. From the Enlightenment to the present there have been many persons who have revolted against this concept and have argued instead that man is essentially reasonable and good, and that while he may make mistakes and commit wrongs out of ignorance, he does not deliberately commit evil acts. Furthermore, the argument has often run, even man's mistakes and acts of ignorance can be overcome, through better education and environmental changes.

Despite the fact that such ideas as these are in strong opposition to basic Christian convictions, large groups within the Christian faith, especially in liberal Protestantism, have at times taken up these ideas and proclaimed them as part of the Christian message. But in the past few decades, in the midst of so much bloodshed and hate, such optimistic views have been seriously challenged, and two of the men who have been most effective in this challenge are Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr. These men have exerted strong influence in leading Protestantism back to a serious study of the concept of sin. Because of their

important contribution to Christian theology in their understanding of this concept, I have sought in the first two chapters of this dissertation to present the essence of their doctrines of sin, so that they might be better understood and more accurately evaluated by those of us seeking a Christian understanding of man.

I have limited my study of Karl Barth to his Church Dogmatics, Volume III, Part 2, and Volume IV, Parts 1, 2, and 3. In these volumes he presents, in a somewhat systematic manner, his entire doctrine of man. Because of this fact I have felt it best to study these volumes in detail and to seek an understanding of his doctrine of man on the basis of their content. In so doing I have made the assumption that his mature viewpoint is most accurately reflected in the Church Dogmatics, and that his other books neither undermine this doctrine nor add significantly to it. What little reading I have done in his other works has tended to substantiate this assumption, but since I have not read all his books, I can only hope that this assumption is correct. However, should it prove wrong, I have at least presented one of his views, and it is a view worthy of our consideration.

My analysis of Niebuhr's thought is derived primarily from The Nature and Destiny of Man and The Self and the Dramas of History. It is in these books that I consider him to be most lucid and systematic in presenting his concept of man. I have made reference to some of his other writings only to clarify further or to emphasize ideas expressed in these two books.

I have divided the study of each man's doctrine into

sections dealing with basic aspects of his thought, and have attempted to arrange these sections in terms of a logical progression, each section leading naturally to the next. The order is not the only one possible, but is that which personally I feel is most conducive to an understanding of the subject matter. I have found the use of sections particularly helpful in dealing with Barth's theology, because even when he attempts to be systematic he manages to incorporate a great deal of disorder into his voluminous writings. The need for such an approach is not so great with Niebuhr, but I believe it does prove helpful in understanding him also. Furthermore, this division facilitates comparison of the two men's thought. Unfortunately, perfect correlation of sections is not feasible, because their thinking at certain points goes in radically different directions. But despite this fact, some degree of correlation has proven possible and, I hope, helpful.

In the last two chapters I have sought to relate Barth's and Niebuhr's thought to pastoral counseling, especially in light of the challenges to Christianity made by modern psychology and secularism. The Church has, in the past few decades, become increasingly more aware of the importance of psychological insights for pastoral counseling. But the use of such resources creates a significant problem, in that many psychologists stand opposed to the concept of sin. As a result it can prove most difficult for the minister, in his pastoral counseling, to hold both to a Christian doctrine of sin and also to the insights

offered by psychology. This difficulty is intensified by a growing secularism even within the Church, which tends to make any concept of sin appear archaic and irrelevant. In CHAPTER III, I attempt to analyze the situation created by these factors and have given special emphasis to the thought of Erich Fromm, Carl Rogers, O. Hobart Mowrer, and Paul Tournier, all of whom are psychologists with ideas pertinent to a serious study of the purposes of pastoral counseling and the methods to be employed in it.

Finally, in CHAPTER IV, I have made a comparison of some important aspects of Barth's and Niebuhr's concepts of sin and have then presented what I find to be the implications of these concepts for pastoral counseling, with special reference to the problems of opportunities introduced to this form of counseling by psychology and secularism.

In conclusion, I want to express my deep thanks to Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr., not only for his concern and patience in advising me in the writing of this paper, but also for the exciting insights into the Christian faith which he has given to me as I have sat with him in class and office. To be a profound scholar or an inspiring teacher is a significant achievement. And to be both at the same time is a fine and rare accomplishment indeed. This accomplishment is fully exemplified in Dr. Cobb.

CHAPTER I

KARL BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF MAN AS SINNER

Introductory Remarks

Although I have limited my study of Karl Barth's doctrine of man to the Church Dogmatics, I still have found it quite difficult to present his thought in a systematic way. He writes in a loosely organized style, continually makes detours in his presentation, and he almost buries his key concepts under a mass of words. I have attempted to distill from these many words the essential points of his doctrine, and to present and analyze them in this chapter. I hope this attempt can throw light on what has been a powerful and influential doctrine in our time.

I begin this study with sections considering the uniqueness of man and the concept of universal salvation. Barth has made basic assumptions concerning both of these matters, and these assumptions must be understood if we are to appreciate the full meaning and implications of his concept of sinful man.

The Uniqueness of Man

Man exists, writes Barth, because God's Spirit grounds, constitutes, and maintains him as the soul of his body.¹ That man is body means that he is visible, outward, and material.

¹Barth, III:2, 344.

However, he is not merely material, but is a living body, because he is also soul, the life necessary for his body and not independent of it. Man is not only soul that "has" a body which perhaps it does not require. Rather, he is bodily soul and besouled body.² That he is both body and soul means that he is both visible and invisible, outward and also inward, earthly and also heavenly. He belongs to the earth, yet he also partakes of "the invisibility of created reality in the midst of the visibility, and of the being of heaven even as a being which is wholly of earth."³

Soul and body go together of necessity; one cannot live without the other. But that man "is wholly and simultaneously both soul and body does not exclude the fact that he is always both in different ways; first soul and then body."⁴ God's creative and sustaining Spirit works through the soul, Barth argues, but the soul must have its body in order to have outwardness, space and means.⁵

To grasp the uniqueness of man we must understand that soul "is life, self-contained life, the independent life of a corporeal being." Life in general means the capacity for action, self-movement, self-activity, and self-determination. Independent life is present when these qualities "are not only the continuous and partial appearance of a general life process, but where there

²Barth, III:2, 350.

³Ibid., III:2, 350-51.

⁴Ibid., III:2, 372

⁵Ibid., III:2, 372-73.

is a specific living subject." Thus we must doubt that some living beings are souls because their life does not seem to be independent, but, instead, the partial appearance of a general life-process. Independent life does not emerge "except where the capacity for action of a corporeal being is not bound to a specific point in space." Thus plants would seem to be excluded, and we are left with animals and man. But we cannot even be sure about animals, for we lack positive knowledge that the animal is an independent life, the life of a specific subject. Consequently, when we speak of soul most accurately, we can speak only of the human soul.

Soul is independent, the life of a particular subject. I know it is such independent life as I know myself. I know life as mine, as the life proper to myself as a subject.⁶

Thus man is able to be conscious of himself as soul of his body; he is able to be both subject and object to himself.

Because man has God's Spirit and is thus soul of his body, he is capable of meeting God, of being a person for and in relation to Him, and of being one as God is one. He is capable of being aware of himself as different both from God and from the rest of the created world. He is capable of recognizing himself and of being responsible for himself. He exists in the execution of this self-recognition and self-responsibility before his Creator. . . . That man has Spirit means, whatever it may mean for the animal, that he is capable of executing this activity. He can recognize himself; he can be responsible for himself. Whether or how the animal can do this is not apparent to us.

God has created man in this unique way for the special

⁶Barth, III:2, 374.

⁷Ibid., III;2, 395.

reason that He might enter into covenant relations with this self-conscious, responsible being. This is a fact, Barth argues, because in Christ God has made known His attitude concerning man. Indeed, it is in Christ, who as God was also man, that we truly see the intentions of the Creator for His creature man. Barth insists that while Jesus is both God and man and, therefore, different from us, yet we do resemble Him in His humanity. He, after all, did participate in human nature.⁸ What then do we know of real man, the man whom God has created, in Jesus? We know three factors.

1. In Jesus' humanity we are confronted immediately with the being of God, and we see that Jesus exists in the fulfilling of the Lordship of God, that His being consists wholly in the history in which God is active as His Deliverer. In short, He is for God because God first willed to bind Himself to Him (Jesus).⁹

On a very definite ground, that of the view of the man Jesus which is normative for Christian theology, we have postulated that real man must . . . be a being which as such belongs to God, to which God turns as Savior, the determination of which is God's glory, which exists under the Lordship of God and is set in the service of God.¹⁰

We know that man is the creature meant for covenant with God because Jesus was in covenant with God.

2. The content of man's being is his covenant relation to God. The form of his being, his humanity distinct from God, is

⁸ Barth, III:2, 72.

⁹ Ibid., III:2, 73-74.

¹⁰ Ibid., III:2, 121.

his being for other men. The form of real man is also found in Christ, who was man for men.¹¹ Therefore, "humanity absolutely, the humanity of each and every man, consists in the determination of man's being as a being with others, or rather with the other man."¹²

3. Again, we look to Jesus to determine the constitution of real man, this creature in covenant with God and in encounter with fellow men. In Him we see no dichotomy between body and soul, but, rather, an embodied soul and besouled body. He is whole man, whose outer actions are always at oneness with, but subordinate to, His inner life. Upon this firm basis we realize that man is an ordered whole, an embodied soul and besouled body.¹³

Thus Barth affirms that man, to be truly man as seen in Jesus, must fulfill three requirements: he must be covenant partner with God; he must be in relationship to fellow man; and he must be a unified person, an embodied soul and besouled body. It will become apparent in this chapter that Barth's doctrine of man as sinner centers on man's continual refusal to fulfill these requirements and on God's refusal to reject or destroy him despite this act of rebellion.

Universal Salvation

Barth, throughout the Church Dogmatics, resists endorsing

¹¹ Barth, III:2, 208.

¹² Ibid., III:2, 243.

¹³ Ibid., III:2, 325-44, esp. 343-44.

the concept of apokatastasis, stating that the question of universal salvation belongs to eschatology, and that "we must not arrogate to ourselves that which can be given and received only as a free gift."¹⁴ But if we are to understand Barth's doctrine of man correctly, we must realize that, in fact, his whole doctrine is built upon the presupposition that all men have been saved in Christ. And this presupposition is built, in turn, upon what Barth understands to be the triumph of God's grace in Christ, a triumph that leaves sin impotent. The cross was a great cosmic victory, and it was this victory for the reason that in it God finally and decisively drained the chaos, or nothingness, of its demonic power.

This concept of the chaos is not at all easy to understand. But essentially Barth sees it as that which God did not create at creation. It is not His real, His proper work. It is, rather, "His 'opus alienum,' His alien, His strange work, i.e., the work of His not-willing."¹⁵ Thus, already at creation God decided against it. Consequently, this chaos has no true reality. As the nothingness that God rejected at creation, it "exists" simply as the object of rejection, at God's left hand.

Now, interestingly enough, though this chaos has no reality, though it exists only in the wrathful No of God, man has continually flirted with it and made compact with it. His sin, his unbelief, is his self-surrender to this chaos.¹⁶ Indeed, it is

¹⁴Barth, IV:3,1, 477.

¹⁵Berkouwer, p. 73.

¹⁶Barth, IV:1, 79.

man's unbelief, his turning from the Creator to that which is not, that allowed the chaos to invade the creation.¹⁷

But God would not allow this chaos to come between Him and His creation. Already, in His act of creation, He had expressed His wrath toward this chaos in separating light from darkness. But this separation only prefigured the triumph he would attain in the cross.¹⁸ There, in Christ, He both judged man's sinful compact with chaos, and took upon Himself that judgement.

The one who . . . acted against sin, i.e., who suffered in our place the death of the old man, the man of sin, is none other than God Himself in the person of the Son of Man. . . . God Himself had to come down, to give Himself, to sacrifice Himself, in order that a place should be found for a man freed from this evil, and a reconciled world introduced in this man. On the cross of Golgotha God Himself intervened to accomplish this liberation,¹⁹ paying the price Himself, giving Himself up to death.

There, at the cross, God made clear once for all that nothing, not even nothingness or chaos, can separate man from God's grace. For, Barth writes, "God has broken evil in Jesus Christ and since He has done this, it is settled once for all that it can exist only within limits which were fixed beforehand and beyond which it cannot go."²⁰ In Christ the power of the chaos to make real compact with man has been emptied and judged. God still allows it to be an apparently effective force, but it is not a dangerous force.²¹ Christ bore the rejection we deserve for our flirtation

¹⁷Berkouwer, pp. 62, 82.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁹Barth, IV:2, 400-401.

²⁰Ibid., IV:1, 409.

²¹Berkouwer, p. 75.

with the chaos, and in so doing forever overcame its power to separate man from God's grace. Thus all men have been saved.

In God himself man stands already in the light of life—each man and all men. For man's election is his election in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, whom the Father and He Himself, has not elected for this or that man but for all men, and who has not elected this or that man but all men for Himself. In this twofold election He has taken to Himself and away from them all the rejection which applies to all men as sinners and separates them from God. Not in and of himself, but in Jesus Christ as the eternal beginning of all God's ways and works, no man is rejected, but all are elected in Him. . . .²²

This concept of universal salvation or election, wrought in the Christ-event, helps us to understand Barth's meaning when he speaks of the impossibility of sin. In III:2 he says:

It is to be noted that here in this grounding of humanity in the election of God is to be found the reason for our affirmation that sin is for man an ontological impossibility.²³

Or again:

Sin is undoubtedly committed and exists. Yet sin itself is not a possibility but an ontological impossibility for man.²⁴

It is interesting to note that in IV: Parts 1, 2, and 3, where Barth deals in great detail with the problem of sin, he does not mention the "ontological" impossibility of sin, though he continues to speak of the impossibility of sin. This would suggest that he has abandoned the term "ontological" in describing the nature of sin, perhaps feeling this word is too confusing or philosophical. However, I do not believe he has changed his basic

²²Barth, IV:3,2, 484.

²³Ibid., III:2, 146.

²⁴Ibid., III:2, 136.

thought concerning the impossibility of sin. G. C. Berkouwer argues that when Barth III;2, uses the expression "ontological impossibility of sin" he means:

Sin is ontologically impossible because sin means a falling away from grace and it is precisely God's primordial will that our unfaithfulness should not put to nought His faithfulness. For this reason it is impossible to ascribe to the creature 'anything that looks like a possibility in the direction of chaos.' Does not man by reason of election live in grace? Has not God come between man and the chaos . . . ? Man who is man in this way has neither the right nor the possibility of choosing the wrong direction. It is in the light of these considerations . . . that sin appears in its terrible absurdity. When man decides against God, he does this not on the basis of his nature and of a possibility residing within that nature, but 'he reaches in reality for that which has been made impossible for him and against which he has also been secured.'²⁵

I believe Berkouwer has made a correct interpretation here of Barth's thought in III:2. That sin is ontologically impossible in that it cannot separate us from God's grace would seem to be Barth's meaning in saying:

Godlessness is not, therefore, a possibility, but an ontological impossibility for man. Man is not without, but with God. This is not to say . . . that godless men do not exist. Sin is undoubtedly committed and exists. Yet sin itself is not a possibility but an ontological impossibility for man. We are actually with Jesus, i.e., with God. This means that our being does not include but excludes sin. To be in sin, in godlessness, is a mode of being contrary to our humanity. For the man who is with Jesus--and this is man's ontological determination--is with God.²⁶

Man as such, because he is the fellow of the man Jesus, is from the very first destined to share in the deliverance from evil effected in this one man, to participate in the conflict against the enemy of all creaturely being . . . to belong to the body of the Head in whom the triumph of the Creator has been achieved on

²⁵Berkouwer, pp. 227-28.

²⁶Barth, III:2, 136.

behalf of the creature.

It is to be noted that here in this grounding of humanity in the election of God is . . . the reason for our affirmation that sin is for man an ontological impossibility. . . . By the very fact that he is man--because as such he has his Head in the man Jesus, and shared in the battle fought and the history of triumph inaugurated by Him--he is from the very first as much preserved and secured as he can be without being himself the man Jesus.²⁷

While, as mentioned above, "onotological" is missing in the later Church Dogmatics, this same theme is present and predominant though the word "impossible" is not always explicitly used.

And although the covenant of God with man has been totally . . . broken by the fall of man, yet it has not been reversed or removed or destroyed as the omnipotent work of the grace of God. As eternally ordained and unalterably established by God it is faithfully kept and restored and renewed by Him with reference to fallen man as God turns to him. God does not allow Himself to be diverted by the sin of man from addressing His Yes to him. . . . It is a Yes which contains a strong and penetrating rejection of his sin and of his being as it has fallen through sin.²⁸

The inner futility of human sloth, like the impotence of human pride, does not alter the fact that it does actually take place as a form of human corruption. It is a fact. Its character is purely negative. It is not necessary or genuine or, in the strict sense, possible. It is only impossible. . . . It is a fact in the whole futility in which it is created and posited. . . . It is the something of our persistence in turning to that which is not, to that which God has not willed but denied and rejected. . . . Man does actually will the impossible.²⁹

Alongside it [election] the unfaithfulness, arrogance, negligence, and insincerity, indeed, the whole sin of the Christian, is impossible, dreadful and damnable as thus qualified. But even the worst sin of the Christian cannot alter the totality of what befalls him in the process of his vocation.³⁰

²⁷Barth, III:2, 146.

²⁸Ibid., IV:1, 481.

²⁹Ibid., IV:1, 411.

³⁰Ibid., IV:3,2, 508.

Thus we see that from Barth's perspective sin is ontologically impossible, or, as he says in later volumes of the Church Dogmatics, futile, ineffective and impossible. Sin is impossible because Christ has borne the rejection we deserve for our turning toward the chaos. And because He has borne our rejection, God says Yes forever to us, and nothing can separate us from that Yes.

We must now turn our attention again to Barth's view of real man--made to be covenant partner of God, to be in relationship to fellow man, and to be soul of his body. Fulfilment of these requirements makes up the real being of man, the being we see so clearly in Jesus. Now sin does have an effect on this being in us who are sinners.

Man sets out to be his own helper and that is what he has to be. He is left to himself, to his phantasy, his self-will, his projects and constructions and crafts. . . . And this is pure helplessness: to be without grace is to be without help.³¹

Being against God, seeking to be a god, man also stands over and against his neighbor. He lives in isolation.³² And by seeking life on his own, "he loses himself, his soul, and his life. . . ." The degree to which he finds this subjection to God difficult is "the degree to which he finds it difficult to be free, to affirm himself, to realize his subjectivity, to accept his responsibility."³³ Sin is a gravely dangerous factor that can lead man to "a fearful and fatal compromising of his reality, his determination."³⁴

³¹Barth, IV:1, 465.

³³Ibid., IV:1, 464.

³²Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., III:2, 206.

But sin cannot destroy the being of man. Standing beside the last quoted statement is another stating that "man can as little destroy or alter himself as create himself." He adds:

If there is a basic form of humanity in which it corresponds and is similar to the divine determination of man, in this correspondence and similarity we have something constant and persistent, an inviolable particularity of his creaturely form which cannot be effaced or lost or changed or made unrecognisable even in sinful man.³⁵

He proceeds to point out as examples of constant factors that man is the creature of God and soul of his body.

One of Barth's clearest elaborations of what sin cannot do is found in IV:1.

This [sinning] does not mean . . . that he has ceased to be a man. He has not lost--even in part--the good nature which was created by God, to acquire instead another and evil nature. . . . The Bible accuses man as a sinner from head to foot, but it does not dispute to man his full and unchanged humanity, his nature as God created it good, the possession and use of all the faculties which God has given him. He still has his determination for God, his being as the soul of a body, his being in his time. And if it is true that the divine likeness referred to in Genesis 1:27 consists in his fellow-humanity, we cannot even speak of the loss of his divine likeness; for even as a sinner he has not ceased to be the husband with the wife and the wife with the husband, man as the fellow of all other men and with all other man as fellows.³⁶

Man may set his whole being in the service of evil, and, as a result, exist in that service. But still his being is not altered. He is in covenant with God, in relationship to his fellow men, and soul of his body. And though he may pervert these aspects of his being, he cannot destroy them. A quotation from IV:2 sums up this discussion.

³⁵Barth, III:2, 206.

³⁶Ibid., IV:1, 492-93.

I may close my eyes, I may shut them as tight as I can, or I may turn away from the sun, but this does not alter the fact that the sun shines on me too, and that I have eyes to see it. I may try to cease or refuse to be the man I am in that one new man. Evading the knowledge of God, I may contradict myself. It is my folly that I do this. But in my folly I can only contradict myself. I can no more destroy myself than I can the light of the man Jesus in which I exist.³⁷

And man cannot destroy himself because sin is impossible. It cannot drown out God's Yes that keeps us in covenant and in divine likeness, and that sustains us as souls of our bodies. God has said No to chaos and sin. Though man can and does inexplicably choose compact with chaos, this cannot "do him in." He belongs to God and God will abide with him!

An Analysis of Sin and its Consequences

Keeping in mind the fact that all men are of the elect, according to Barth, and therefore that sin is impossible, we must now turn to an analysis of sin in its three forms as pride, sloth, and falsehood. A few preliminary remarks are necessary, however.

Not only is sin impossible, in Barth's thinking, but it is also absurd, inexplicable, and stupid. The root of all sin is unbelief.

Disobedience springs up necessarily and irresistibly from the bitter root of unbelief. It is true enough that unbelief is the sin, the original form and source of all sins, and in the last analysis the only sin because it is the sin which produces and embraces all other sins. In all sins it is unbelief which transgresses God's command, which makes man lawless, which ignores and offends the divine majesty.³⁸

³⁷Barth, IV:2, 410.

³⁸Ibid., IV:1, 414.

In speaking of the slothful aspect of sin, he remarks:

Again, this form obviously falls under the even more penetrating definition of sin as unbelief. For the disobedience in which man refuses the divine direction and does positively that which God does not will has its basis in the fact that he does not grasp the promise given him with this direction, but refuses to trust in the One who demonstrates and maintains the faithfulness in this overwhelming way, not claiming his obedience with the severity and coldness of an alien tyrant but as the source of his life. . . . He [man] hardens himself against the driving benevolence addressed to him in the divine demand. The sloth of man, too, is a form of unbelief.³⁹

When he refers to sin as sloth, Barth says that human care is a potent cause of this sin.⁴⁰ But upon close inspection, we find human care is ultimately a form of unbelief.

The specific operation of care . . . consists in the fact that already at its root it means not only a general turning away from God but an incomprehensibly desired remoteness from God at the very point where God is nearest to man as God, where He encounters him most impressively and concretely as God . . .⁴¹

The sin of falsehood also has at its root a form of unbelief, a desire not to put one's trust in God.

It [falsehood] takes place as man desires and attempts to avoid Jesus Christ as the true Witness encountering him. Man would rather escape this encounter. He fears the One who encounters him and the implications of the encounter. He starts back from what it would mean not to be his own but to belong to this Saviour and Lord. . . .⁴²

And, ultimately, this unbelief at the root of sin, this turning from God toward the chaos, is absurd, foolish and without reason. We can only say of the sinner that

the sin revealed in what he does and seeks to do, baffles understanding or explanation. There is no reason for it.

³⁹Barth, IV:2, 405.

⁴¹Ibid., IV:2, 475.

⁴⁰Ibid., IV:2, 472, 475.

⁴²Ibid., IV:3,1, 435.

It derives directly from that which is not, and it consists in a movement towards it. It is simply a fact, 'factum Brutum.' We can only say concerning it that he does it. He is free, but makes no use of the fact. He is lifted up, but lets himself fall. He is in the light and has eyes to see, but he does not hear or obey. Why? For what reason? There is neither rhyme nor reason. It is simply a fact. To try to find a reason for it is simply to show that we do not realize that we are talking of the evil which is simply evil.⁴³

As lying, too, sin is an arbitrary, unfounded, unjustifiable and wicked breaking out from the reality of the covenant which on the basis of His eternal election of grace God has founded already in and with the creation of all things. . . . In its form as falsehood, however, sin is specifically man's unfounded and inexcusable breaking out from this reality to the extent that it is also truth.⁴⁴

In the following quotations Barth speaks of both the impossibility and absurdity of sin.

By its very nature sin defies explanation or understanding. Both 'ante' and 'post Christum' it is man's impossible possibility which as such is not amenable to rational presentation. It is simply a brute fact.⁴⁵

When man sins, he does that which God has forbidden and does not will. The possibility of doing this is not something which he has from God. . . . But in the final meaning of the term it is inexcusable. It has no basis. It has, therefore, no possibility--we cannot escape this difficult formula--except that of the absolutely impossible. How else can we describe that which is intrinsically absurd but by a formula which is logically absurd? Sin is that which is absurd, man's absurd choice and decision for that which is not. . . .⁴⁶

We shall have to look a little more deeply into these concepts in the discussion of responsibility. At present it is primarily necessary to understand that Barth sees sin as incapable of separating man from grace and the act of sin as absurd and

⁴³Barth, IV:2, 415-16.

⁴⁴Ibid., IV:3,1, 372.

⁴⁵Ibid., IV:3,1, 463.

⁴⁶Ibid., IV:1, 409-10.

inexplicable in the light of God's grace, which is God's Yes for us. Why we respond to this Yes with our little No of unbelief simply cannot be explained, says Barth.

There are reasons for sin, but they are all secondary and ultimately not determinative next to the primary sin of unbelief. In speaking of the sin of sloth in particular, but in such a way as to be applicable to sin in general, he says:

The stupid and inopportune movements of the fool in which stupidity reveals itself are always relatively explicable. They always have their more or less demonstrable grounds and causes, their active and passive impulses both internal and external, by which in large measure they can be understood. But their root, the stupid element in a fool's stupidity, the sin revealed in what he does and seeks to do, baffles understanding or explanation. There is not reason for it. It derives directly from that which is not. and it consists in a movement towards it.⁴⁷

As we proceed to study the three forms of sin analyzed by Barth, we shall see that he refers often to relative explanations but always assumes that at bottom there is no reason for man's unbelief and resultant sin.

We turn now to sin in the form of pride, found in IV:1. Sin, says Barth, is always trespass against God and fratricide. He quotes approvingly the Heidelberg Catechism: "I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbor." Evil consists in the conjunction of the three moments of rebellion against God, enmity with one's neighbor, and sin against oneself.⁴⁸ Sin in its totality can be spoken of as pride, and this is a concrete form

⁴⁷Barth, IV:2, 415.

⁴⁸Ibid., IV:1, 398.

of what Christianity "rightly and more precisely calls the unbelief of man." Pride is the act in which man ignores and offends the divine majesty and the redemptive significance of the divine command, thus rejecting the right that God demands of him.⁴⁹

In contrast to the humility of God revealed in Jesus, we see only pride in man. God became humble flesh, but man attempts to be a prideful god.⁵⁰ In this egotistic life-stance, he loves and chooses the inner nothingness which can only shame him. And while in his choosing he does something actual, "it lacks both necessity and possibility. It has no basis."⁵¹ We cannot explain how or why we are proud: "The absurd act that we commit is as such inexplicable. We can only try to describe it."⁵²

The proud man who seeks to be God is not necessarily a monster. Indeed, he may be quite cultivated and quite "religious."⁵³ But, ironically enough, the more he attempts to assume the position of God, the more he is like the devil, for God is self-giving and not proud. In contrast to God's humility, man desires to be a self-sufficient, self-affirming, self-desiring supreme being, rotating about himself.⁵⁴

Man wants to judge, to be the arbiter between right and wrong. He thinks he sits on a high throne, "but in reality he sits only on a child's stool, blowing his little trumpet,

⁴⁹Barth, IV:1, 414.

⁵⁰Ibid., IV:1, 418.

⁵¹Ibid., IV:1, 419.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., IV:1, 421.

⁵⁴Ibid., IV:1, 422.

cracking his little whip . . . while all the time nothing happens that really matters." He can only play the judge because "it is for God to determine right and wrong" and man cannot usurp His prerogative.⁵⁵

As Barth looks out upon the history of man he sees the sin of pride in everyone everywhere.

The history of the race as a whole is a history of the Titan who in different ways tries to be his own helper, the subject of his own redemptive history.⁵⁶

In short:

In the whole sphere of human activities there are no exceptions to the sin and corruption of man. There is no territory which has been spared and where he does not sin, where he is not perverted. . . . At every point man is in the wrong and in arrears in relation to God. . . . Because his pride is radical and in principle, it is also total and universal and all-embracing, determining all his thoughts and words, and works, his whole inner and hidden life, and his visible external movements and relationships.⁵⁷

Even for his achievements man must feel a sense of shame because he is evil and uses his accomplishments in a prideful way.⁵⁸

Indeed, there never was a golden age, a time when man was sinless: "The first man was immediately the first sinner."⁵⁹

And we cannot blame our sin (in IV:1 sin is of course pride, but sloth and falsehood also apply here) on original sin. There is no such thing as hereditary sin. "No one has to be Adam. We are so, freely and on our own responsibility."⁶⁰

⁵⁵Barth, IV:1, 446.

⁵⁷Ibid., IV:1, 496.

⁵⁹Ibid., IV:1, 508.

⁵⁶Ibid., IV:1, 460.

⁵⁸Ibid., IV:1, 497.

⁶⁰Ibid., IV:1, 509.

(Barth explains that the Adam account is not history but saga.⁶¹)

Yet, Adam has a relevancy to our situation. He is not a fate held over us but the truth about us known to God and revealed to us by the Word. And:

It is the Word of God which forbids us to dream of any golden age in the past or any real progress within Adamic mankind and history or any future state of historical perfection, or indeed to put our hope in anything other than the atonement which has taken place in Jesus Christ.⁶²

Barth touches lightly upon a few secondary causes of sin that lead to unbelief and sin as pride. He uses such words as "error" and "misunderstanding" to describe our views of God. When, in pride, we would be as gods, we are in error in our understanding of God because He is humble, not proud.⁶³ Again, "behind what man sets out to do there is destructive error in which he is engulfed in relation to God." Here Barth points out that it is not true that it is a burden for man to be a servant of God because God is totally gracious. And, Barth adds, "if he only knew God--the way in which God is the one true 'Grand-seigneur'," he would not act with such insolence.⁶⁴

Barth seems quite close at this point to offering an explanation of unbelief, i.e., ignorance about the nature of God. And in another part of the book he speaks again of our misunderstanding of God that leads us to think He is weak and that we must protect ourselves.⁶⁵

⁶¹Barth, IV:1, 508.

⁶²Ibid., IV:1, 511.

⁶³Ibid., IV:1, 452.

⁶⁴Ibid., IV:1, 436-37.

⁶⁵Ibid., IV:1, 466-67.

All these statements give evidence that Barth nears an explanation of unbelief. But he would not want these statements to be so understood. He makes this clear in saying,

The view of God that gives rise to the idea that man has necessarily to help himself is always a false one. When this idea is present we can presuppose that the living God is already closed to him, that this God is unknown, that under His name the form of a stranger, an idea of God (and all ideas of God are false) has taken His place, an idol who, it is thought, has to be met and resisted in this way. What else can man do but misunderstand himself and rush to his destruction when he is overshadowed by the dark cloud of this error concerning God.⁶⁶

Thus, it is unbelief that leads to misunderstandings in our thinking about God, and this brings us full circle. There is no explanation for unbelief, for man's turning from God toward nothingness. Unbelief and resultant sin are simply absurd, inexplicable, and without reason.

Man pays a high price for living in pride, Barth adds. He sets out to be his own helper over and against God and neighbor and as a result, falls into isolation. By trying to save himself, man loses himself, his soul and life. As he rejects God's grace, he loses the freedom that grace provides, and he finds it difficult "to be himself, to realize his subjectivity, to accept his responsibility."⁶⁷ He walks to the edge of chaos in his corruption and feels God's presence as an angry presence.⁶⁸ But yet, man's sin is ultimately ineffective because he is still determined for God, is still soul of his body, and is in relationship with his fellow

⁶⁶Barth, IV:1, 467.

⁶⁷Ibid., IV:1, 464-65.

⁶⁸Ibid., IV:1, 480, 489-90.

men. He is still man with his good nature. He throws himself into contradiction, but he does not cease to be the man to whom God says Yes.⁶⁹

We now turn to an analysis of sin in the form of sloth as found in IV:2, of the Church Dogmatics. The very word "sloth" gives away the meaning of this form of sin. Sloth is "sluggishness, indolence, slowness or inertia," the evil inaction that is forbidden.⁷⁰ Sloth is that form of unbelief that refuses to rise up to the demands of God.

For the disobedience in which man refuses the divine direction and does positively that which God does not will has its basis in the fact that he does not grasp the promise given him with this direction, but refuses to trust in the One who demonstrates and maintains His faithfulness . . . He [man] hardens himself against the divine benevolence addressed to him in the divine demand. The sloth of man, too, is a form of unbelief.⁷¹

Barth argues that we, too often, see sin in its "Luciferian or Promethean brilliance," and fail to grasp it in its less dramatic and interesting form as sloth.

The sinner is not merely Prometheus or Lucifer. He is also--and for the sake of clarity, and to match the grossness of the matter, we will use rather popular expressions--a lazy-bones, a sluggard, a good-for-nothing, a slow-coach and a loafer. He does not exist only in an exalted world of evil; he exists also in a very mean and petty world of evil. . . .⁷²

While Barth seeks to distinguish between pride and sloth, it is a real question whether, in fact, he is able to substantiate the distinction. When he begins to elaborate upon the meaning of

⁶⁹Barth, IV:1, 492-93.

⁷⁰Ibid., IV:2, 403.

⁷¹Ibid., IV:2, 405.

⁷²Ibid., IV:2, 404.

sloth, what he says often would seem to apply equally to pride.

For example:

Our sloth rejects Him. In relation to Him it is our great inaction, our hesitation, our withdrawal into ourselves. Man rejects Him because he wants to elect and will himself, and he does not want to be disturbed in this choice.⁷³

Barth makes the following detailed distinction between pride and sloth, after stating that hatred of God is the culminating point in both.

The overweening pride of man, which consists in the fact that he wants to be and act as God, may at a pinch be understood--and this is perhaps the reason for its sinister beauty--as a perverse love of God, whose frivolous encroachment and usurpation, whose illegitimate attempt to control its object, do of course culminate in a desire that the object should disappear as such, that there should be no God or that God should not be God, that man should be able to sit unhindered on his throne. But sin . . . as sloth is from the very outset his desire not to be illuminated by the existence and nature of God, not to have accept Him, to be without God in the world. The slothful man, who is of course identical with the proud, begins where the other leaves off, i.e., by saying in his heart: "There is no God."⁷⁴

Apparently, what Barth wishes to say is that the prideful man seeks to play God and to lord it over his fellow men, while the slothful man simply wishes to retreat into a corner and be left alone, as he is. But Barth is certainly making a fine distinction in saying that playing God is pride and that electing and willing oneself is sloth! And it would seem that he fails to make the distinction intelligible in many instances, as in the above quotation and in the following one dealing with the slothful man in particular.

⁷³Barth, IV:2, 407.

⁷⁴Ibid., IV:2, 405.

And where men think they have a goodness which is assured not in the active fulfillment of their knowledge of God but in itself, and try to live and act and assert themselves as good in this sense, this is not merely the self-righteousness in which faith is denied but also the stupidity which is forbidden by the Word of God. . . .⁷⁵

Certainly, we do see sin expressing itself in both dramatic and quite undramatic manifestations, but whether these can be classified under two different headings is a debatable point. There is self-love, self-concern, in both sloth and pride, and I believe that both forms of sin could be described more accurately as manifestations of the deeper sin of egocentricity. Barth does not use the term "egocentricity" but it does seem to sum up what he is trying to say. Anyway, he makes clear that pride and sloth are similar in meaning, for he says that the slothful man is the same man who is proud.⁷⁶

Barth offers some secondary causes of sin in the form of sloth, such as laziness, self-satisfaction, folly, and disobedience.⁷⁷ But, of course, the real and ultimate cause of sloth is inexplicable unbelief.

Near the end of his discussion of sloth, Barth turns abruptly to a detailed analysis of human care, or anxiety, as we more commonly call it. God has given us cause to rejoice in our end, because He is there to meet us.⁷⁸ Death is not something to be feared, to be seen as the ultimate evil in life. Rather, it is

⁷⁵Barth, IV:2, 413.

⁷⁶Ibid., IV:2, 405.

⁷⁷Ibid., IV:2, 407, 410, 411, 458.

⁷⁸Ibid., IV:2, 468-69.

part of God's good creation, "one of the tokens of His gracious and merciful and invincible will as Creator."⁷⁹ Christ was victor at this very frontier we fear and he vetoed the ultimate power of death, with the result that there should be no room in our lives for anxiety over our finite existence.⁸⁰

But though we should rejoice concerning death, because God will be there with us, we do not. Instead, we turn away from Him in unbelief. We shun His grace and choose instead to live in anxious care about the finiteness of our lives, "and this, too, is responsible transgression--sin."⁸¹ This is sinful unbelief, manifest as care, in which we act as if Christ were not risen, as if God were not for us both now and at our death.⁸² And the end result is that death, already totally defeated in Christ's resurrection, is the factor we come to fear most during our lifetime.⁸³ And because we fear this nothingness at the end of our lives, we desperately seek to forestall that end by making the present more secure. But we fail in our efforts and anxious care dominates all of life.

In his anxiety man sets his own house on fire. He bursts the dyke which protects his land from flooding. He torments and crushes himself. In his attempts to find security he loses it.⁸⁴

But what is the relation of human care, seen as one more form of impossible and incomprehensible unbelief, to sin in the

⁷⁹Barth, IV:2, 469.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., IV:2, 468.

⁸²Ibid., IV:2, 469.

⁸³Ibid., IV:2, 470-71.

⁸⁴Ibid., IV:2, 472.

form of sloth? I frankly find Barth quite confusing at this point. As I mentioned above, he does not speak of care until the end of his discussion of sloth, which leads me to wonder if it was perhaps an afterthought that he was not quite sure where to insert into his writing. This possibility takes on some degree of plausibility in light of the fact that he makes little effort to correlate this analysis of care with his earlier remarks about sloth as laziness and desire to be left alone. He does mention, however, that "the root of all evil is simply, and powerfully, our human care."⁸⁵ This would appear to mean at least that care is at the root of sloth, and this does in fact seem to be a possible way of interpreting Barth's reason for introducing the concept of care into this particular discussion.⁸⁶ When we turn away from God in unbelief, and choose to live in anxiety concerning our finitude, we begin to act in a slothful manner. In other words, our unbelief acquires the form of human care, which then apparently leads to sloth. But why see human care as a middle term in this movement? Barth had argued earlier that unbelief itself takes the form of sloth, with the help of no middle factor. That earlier approach seems to me to be the more intelligible of the two.

I personally feel Barth's attempt to place care within the context of his discussion of sloth causes a hopeless confusion. Any attempt on my part to justify his doing so would be artificial and would only add to this confusion. I simply fail to understand

⁸⁵Barth, IV:2, 468.

⁸⁶Ibid., IV:2, 475-78.

his reasoning at this point.

It seems to me that what Barth has really done is to present two views of sin here: sin as sloth and sin as human care. Sloth as he generally defines it is simply the laziness that does not want to be disturbed or challenged and seems to have no real connection with anxiety about finite existence with its inevitable movement toward death. The following quotations point to this fact.

Behind the indifference and doubt there is a definite mistrust. In the freedom of the man Jesus it seems that we have a renewal and exaltation from servitude to lordship. But this is an exacting and dangerous business if it necessarily means that we acquire and have in Jesus a Lord, and if His lordship involves that we are demanded to leave our burdensome but comfortable and secure life as slaves and assume responsibility as lords.⁸⁷

And this refusal to move where we can and should bestir ourselves and follow Him is the unreason and ignorance which makes us the stupid fools we are. This is the folly in which we want to remain as we are instead of being those we are in Him and by Him.⁸⁸

Man goes down to ruin when he slips from the place which he is allotted by the grace of God. And he does this by his own choice. He lets himself go. He lets himself be pushed. Where he himself can and should be moving and pushing, he allows himself to be moved and pushed. This means that he falls. . . . But it does not come upon him as a fatality. He brings it about himself by letting himself fall. Sin as sloth, in this particular form of dissipation, is indiscipline.⁸⁹

The kind of sloth he is speaking of in these examples seems to have no real relation to human care. Thus, I would argue that what Barth is really speaking of in IV:2 is sin in the

⁸⁷Barth, IV:2, 408.

⁸⁸Ibid., IV:2, 410.

⁸⁹Ibid., IV:2, 454.

absurd and inexplicable form of laxiness or slothfulness and sin in the absurd and inexplicable form of human care. Both laziness and care are manifestations of unbelief, and thus, in Barth's categories of thought, impossible.

The consequences of care and sloth parallel those of pride. As he chooses human care over and against God, man is of course without God, in compact with nothingness, and in isolation with his anxieties. "Care makes a man stupid," full of anxiety arising from his dread of the future, with the result that he is blocked up in himself.⁹⁰ And the result of the failure of this vertical relation brings disaster on the horizontal plane, in human relations. As one isolates himself from God in human care, so he isolates himself from his fellow men.

Each individual has his own cares which others cannot share with him and which do not yield any companionship or friendship or fellowship or union or brotherhood, however soundly established. By his nature he is isolated and lonely at heart, and therefore in all that he does or does not do.⁹¹

Care dissolves and atomizes society, awakening the inhuman element in us and throwing us into a vicious circle, in which isolation from God causes inhumanity and inhumanity then intensifies isolation from God.⁹²

Laziness has a decidedly negative effect upon man also. This sinfulness in the form of sloth leads to disintegration of the disciplined unity of man as soul of his body, a unity revealed

⁹⁰ Barth, IV:2, 476.

⁹¹ Ibid., IV:2, 477.

⁹² Ibid., IV:2, 441.

in Jesus as a requirement of realman. The result is that soul seeks "flight into better regions which he himself has selected or invented," while the body asserts itself or falls into sickness.⁹³

The end result of both sloth and care are terrible and far reaching, for they throw man into contradiction against God, neighbor, and self.

We turn now to sin as falsehood, which, in encounter with the prophetic work of Christ makes itself known "as a negative reflection of the self-revelation and glory of the Mediator, as the darkness resisting the light of life, as the contradiction of the truth which reaches man."⁹⁴ Sin against God's grace is falsehood as it is also pride, sloth, and care. Falsehood indeed plays a part in pride, sloth, and care, for we desperately seek to hide our true selves from view as we live in these sinful stances. But yet, falsehood must be seen also as a particular form of sin because in historical encounter with the Word of divine grace, it becomes "mature, virulent and open."⁹⁵

God's Word discloses to man that God is for him, and man should respond with his own unequivocal Yes. But in fact man does not so respond. Rather, he answers in falsehood. That he does this is nonsensical and incomprehensible.⁹⁶ His lying is "an arbitrary, unfounded, unjustifiable and wicked breaking out

⁹³ Barth, IV:2, 478.

⁹⁴ Ibid., IV:3, 1, 369.

⁹⁵ Ibid., IV:3, 1, 372-73.

⁹⁶ Ibid., IV:3, 1, 374.

from the reality of the covenant that God has founded."⁹⁷

Barth argues that sin as falsehood is the Christian sin, because it arises in historical encounter with Christ.⁹⁸ Jesus Christ is the truth, "as the true Witness of His true deity and humanity, and the authentic Witness of the saving grace of God which has appeared in Him justifying and sanctifying man."⁹⁹ He, as the truth, is the Law or norm of God, "confronted and measured by which man is shown up as a transgressor, and specifically as a deceiver and a liar."¹⁰⁰ In encounter with God's Yes in Christ the falsehood in man already present in pride, sloth, and care, now comes fully into its own: "It awakens, lives and acts in opposition to Him." How incomprehensible but true it is, exclaims Barth, that man should respond to his justification and sanctification in Christ with "denial, perversion and falsification."¹⁰¹

Why do we so respond to God's act in Christ? We have already said the response is nonsensical, incomprehensible and unfounded. Yet again there are some relative and secondary reasons for man's falsehood. He resists God's Yes because he fears the implications of no longer being his own, but God's. This might put demands upon him which he is unwilling to bear.¹⁰² But primarily, man responds in falsehood because he finds offensive the fact that "the true Witness is the man of Gethsemane and

⁹⁷ Barth, IV:3,1, 372.

⁹⁸ Ibid., IV:3,1, 374, 435.

⁹⁹ Ibid., IV:3,1, 371.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., IV:3,1, 435.

Golgotha," and, therefore, the truth is the truth of His passion and death.¹⁰³ Christ's truth,

the truth attested by Him, consists in the fact that the reconciliation of the world to God took place when He (2 Cor. 5:21) was made sin by God that we might be the righteousness of God in Him, when he was treated by God as the sin of the world which He found impossible and intolerable, and therefore when He was rejected and destroyed as its Bearer and Representative.¹⁰⁴

To hear Christ is to hear the sigh of one judged, condemned, expelled and rejected in our place. To believe in Him is to realize His place ought to be ours. Now it is hard enough to accept the idea that God entered human history, but it is simply intolerable to face the implications of the cross and the sinfulness of our lives that required it.¹⁰⁵

Thus man seeks to render the truth of the cross innocuous, "to work it over, to translate and reinterpret and transform it, to make it a less troublesome penultimate Word of God instead of His ultimate Word."¹⁰⁶ We seek to put the emphasis on Christ's teachings about love, and to interpret His death as that of a martyr. Or we say His life and death point to the fact that suffering is the true substance of the truth disclosed to man or that Christ is the typical representative "of the ways and destinies of all men."¹⁰⁷ But whatever our interpretation of Christ, it contains falsehood, as effort to take the offense of the cross out of the truth revealed to us. We do not openly deny

¹⁰³Barth, IV:3, 1, 441.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., IV:3,1, 441-42.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., IV:3,1, 442.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., IV:3,1, 443.

Christ; we simply kiss Him as did Judas.¹⁰⁸

Again, this reaction by man is incomprehensible, Barth emphasizes. Man should respond with joy and thanksgiving to God's Yes in the cross, but he does not so respond. Yet his falsehood, no more than his pride or sloth, can drown out God's Yes. It has been spoken and stands for all time.¹⁰⁹

This sin of falsehood leads to our own condemnation, to our damning of ourselves.¹¹⁰ We deliberately choose to be lost. At least the non-Christian is not fully aware of his sad state. But the Christian is! He knows with a "suppressed knowledge" that he has turned his back to the truth.¹¹¹ Thus he must experience the agony of knowing how much he has lost in living in his false situation.¹¹² His falsehood cannot, of course, alter or set aside the reality of God and man in Christ, but it can and does create misery for himself as he looks out upon a reality that is defaced, distorted, and corrupted by his lying. "In accordance with his untruth and falsification, he finds himself in an untrue and falsified situation. He is a bewitched man in a bewitched world."¹¹³ The man without Christ is a man without a center to his life and with no definite orientation. He looks out upon a world devoid of God's love in Christ and, therefore, a world that is not, in an ultimate sense. Herein lies the

¹⁰⁸Barth, IV:3,1, 436.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., IV:3,1, 463.

¹¹⁰Ibid., IV:3,1, 461-64.

¹¹¹Ibid., IV:3,1, 467.

¹¹²Ibid., IV:3,1, 466.

¹¹³Ibid., IV:3,1, 469.

tragedy of falsehood: that we refuse the grace that would give life its true center and purpose, and turn instead to the chaos, to meaninglessness and its resultant factors.¹¹⁴

Before we leave this analysis of sin, I want to stress my previous remark that I believe Barth's concepts of pride and sloth should be classified within the more inclusive concept of egocentricity. Furthermore, I think it is accurate to place Barth's understanding of falsehood within this wider category also. Pride, sloth, and falsehood, as he speaks of them, all deal with man's narrow self-centeredness arising from unbelief.

I suggested earlier that Barth should make human care a fourth form of sin, instead of placing it within the definition of sloth. But even as a fourth form of sin, it too would fit within the category of egocentricity, because it is excessive self-concern also.

Thus I believe Barth would offer more clarity to his understanding of sin if he argued that unbelief leads to egocentricity, which then manifests itself in these various forms. This approach would give unity to his doctrine of sin without undermining it at any point.

Finally, it is important to note that sin is understood by Barth as having two dimensions--the vertical, or revolt against God, and the horizontal, or inhumanity toward self and fellow man. The primary sin is unbelief, and this leads to sin (as egocentri-

¹¹⁴ Barth, IV:3,1, 469-76.

city, I would say) against self and neighbor.

How can man seek and find his brother in man if he will not allow God to be his Father? The necessary consequence of vertical self-withdrawal is horizontal self-withdrawal and isolation. . . . Without the knowledge of God, which the stupid man despises, there is no meaningful companionship between man and man, no genuine co-operation, no genuine sharing either of joy or sorrow, no true society.¹¹⁵

It [sin] consists always and everywhere in trespass against God and fratricide. Always and everywhere man has to recognize and confess (as in Q. 5 of the Heidelberg Cat.): 'I am inclined by nature to hate God and my neighbor.' And it is always and everywhere true that in so doing he becomes guilty of self-destruction, of treachery against his own nature as given by God and created good.¹¹⁶

Once man has forsaken God, has withdrawn from loving relations with his neighbor, and has turned against himself, he enters a vicious circle in which inhumanity toward self and neighbor intensifies separation from God, which in turn intensifies inhumanity toward self and neighbor, and so the process goes.¹¹⁷

The Problem of Responsibility

Having analyzed Barth's doctrine of sin, we are now confronted with the task of asking whether, within his system of thought, man can be held responsible, accountable for his sin. Certainly Barth is eager to assert man's responsibility for sinful unbelief. His continual emphasis on unbelief as absurd and inexplicable points up this fact: there is no inner or outer necessity for sin.¹¹⁸ It has been noted already that Barth

¹¹⁵ Barth, IV:2, 420-21.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., IV:1, 398.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., IV:2, 441.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., IV:1, 410, 433, 464.

attacks the concept of hereditary original sin because it has "a hopelessly naturalistic, deterministic and even fatalistic ring."¹¹⁹ Adam is not a fate hanging over us: "No one has to be Adam. We are so freely and on our own responsibility."¹²⁰ We must abandon the idea of hereditary sin and speak only of original sin, allowing this term to make clear the voluntary and responsible life of every man.¹²¹ All we can say of Adam is that we are represented in his deed and that we resemble him in our sinning, which we are not fated to commit.¹²²

Throughout most of Barth's discussion of unbelief as absurd and inexplicable, there seems to be the underlying assumption that man is accountable for his sin because grace is obvious and because all men may readily know of it and respond to it. That they do not is what is so inexplicable. Much of the time Barth seems to speak of this "obviousness" of grace in terms of the historical event of Jesus Christ, as if the knowledge of God's Yes in Christ were available to all men at all times. The following quotations seem to rest on this assumption.

Man's sin is unbelief in God who was 'in Christ reconciling the world to Himself,' who in Him elected and loved man from all eternity. . . .¹²³

We act as though the work and Word of God were nothing, as though Jesus were not risen. We make no use of the freedom which we are granted in him.¹²⁴

¹¹⁹Barth, IV:1, 501.

¹²⁰Ibid., IV:1, 509.

¹²¹Ibid., IV:1, 501.

¹²²Ibid., IV:1, 510-11.

¹²³Ibid., IV:1, 415.

¹²⁴Ibid., IV:2, 469.

In all its forms sin is man's perverted dealing with the stern goodness and righteous mercy of God addressed to him in Jesus Christ. It is their denial and rejection, their misunderstanding and misuse.¹²⁵

At other times Barth seems to speak of a grace perhaps knowable outside the Christ-event.

The disobedience and therefore the sin of man was revealed at Golgotha as unbelief in this God--but only revealed, for in fact (in Israel and among the nations) it was never anything else but unbelief in this God. . . .¹²⁶

There is no sense in man trying to evade Him on the ground that his being is too unlike the divine being. . . . The relationship is there already, open and self-evident because it has been created by this One who is unlike him. . . . How can he ever attain anything higher than that God should be gracious to Him and he should accept it?¹²⁷

Of course, as previously mentioned, Barth sees mature falsehood as the Christian sin, a sin taking place in relation to the Christ-event. But this very approach to the matter seems to imply that pride and sloth are not particularly Christian sins but are based on revolt against God's grace revealed in other ways than in Christ. This could be Barth's meaning in the following passage.

Independently of its [falsehood] co-operation with the first two forms, it has its own meaning and character. These derive from the fact that it is not merely in the material, intrinsically timeless and constant opposition in principle of man to the grace of God, but in his historical encounter with the Word of divine grace . . . that sin in this third form of falsehood becomes mature, virulent and open.¹²⁸

¹²⁵Barth, IV:3,1, 369.

¹²⁶Ibid., IV:1, 415.

¹²⁷Ibid., IV:1, 488.

¹²⁸Ibid., IV:3,1, 372-73.

But now that we have reached the point where Barth seems to be advocating some sort of natural theology (a rather shocking point to reach with Barth!), we must stop and ask if we are not perhaps heading in a wrong direction and misinterpreting him at a most vital point.

Some important light can be thrown on this matter if we realize that while all are saved, God, through the Holy Spirit, makes only some aware of this fact. And this awareness radically alters the life of those possessing it. But how is a man made aware of God's grace?

It is the power of the Word of Jesus Christ which impresses upon man His right of lordship, the right of the owner to his property, awakening and impelling him to a spontaneous recognition and acceptance of this right, in which he gives himself to the discipleship of Jesus Christ, becoming obedient in his freedom and free in his obedience. The Word of Jesus Christ has divine power to accomplish this. . . . The gift and work of the Holy Spirit as the divine power of the Word of vocation is the placing of man in the fellowship with Him, namely, with the being, will, and action of Jesus Christ.¹²⁹

All men are saved, but only a few are illuminated by the Holy Spirit so as truly to be altered in this life.

Illumination means that the light of life carries through its work in a particular man to its conclusion. It shines on all men. But in the event of vocation it does not merely shine on a man. . . . The distinctive element in the covenant of his vocation . . . is that the light, Jesus Christ, as the light of the world, illuminates this man. It does not merely shine for him in general. It now shines for him in such a way that his closed eyes are opened by its shining, or rather his blind eyes are healed by its shining and made to see. . . . Man is called and becomes a Christian as he is illuminated.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Barth, IV:3,2, 537-38.

¹³⁰ Ibid., IV:3,2, 508.

Barth adds that this illumination is not the flaring of a light burning in one already, but "is all an original creation of the One who enables him to know."¹³¹

Thus we see that it is only the one, touched by Christ through the Holy Spirit, who really knows of God's grace. Grace is for all men but only certain ones are made to know of it. And this means that Barth neither assumes that all men are aware of God's act in Christ or that all men, Christian and non-Christian, have some sort of ability really to understand and receive God's grace. While many claim to be Christians, only a few of that number are actually called, and it is this latter group who know the true meaning of grace.¹³²

Furthermore, sin is really known and taken seriously only in the light of this grace. Barth is critical of the older dogmatics for their habit of beginning with a "doctrine of sin, first stating the problem, then giving the decisive answer to it in the doctrine of the incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ. . . ."¹³³ The reason for his criticism is that natural man

may be aware of the problematic nature of his existence as man. But this does not mean even remotely that he is aware of his being as the man of sin, at odds with God and his neighbor and himself.¹³⁴

Outside of God's act in Christ man is aware of imperfection but not of sin and guilt in relation to God and neighbor. Nor can

¹³¹ Barth, IV:3,2, 509.

¹³² Ibid., IV:3,2, 621-22.

¹³³ Ibid., IV:1, 359.

¹³⁴ Ibid., IV:1, 360.

he grasp the powerful contradiction within himself brought about by sin. "Within the sphere of the self-knowledge not enlightened and instructed by the Word of God there is no place for anything worthy of the name of a 'knowledge of sin.'"¹³⁵ Only in Jesus Christ is the man of sin set before us.

Thou art the man! This is what thou doest! This is what thou art! This is the result! We hear Him and we hear this verdict. We see Him, and in this mirror we see ourselves, ourselves as those who commit sin and are sinners. We are here inescapably accused and irrevocably condemned.¹³⁶

In Christ we see our sin in that God has judged us in the self-offering and death of Him. And God continues, even now, to reveal us as the ones "judged and put to death and destroyed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and His being and living and speaking and witness for all ages."¹³⁷ We are all the old men who in Christ were "overtaken by the wrath of God and condemned and executed."¹³⁸

Actually Barth deals with this knowledge of sin in IV:2, which precedes his volume dealing with the awakening of the Christian. As a result, he is not concerned in this particular section to stress his view that only he who is awakened understands and grasps God's grace. However, it is clear from his later work on the awakening of the Christian that it is this person only, who in receiving the gift of grace is made aware of his sinfulness.

¹³⁵Barth, IB:1, 360.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., IV:1, 390.

¹³⁸Ibid., IV:1, 391.

In light of Barth's concept of the awakening of the Christian to grace and consequent knowledge of sin, does it not seem purposeless to flail non-believers for their sinful unbelief when they happen to be among those who have not even been called yet into conscious awareness of God's grace? On the basis of Barth's analysis of the awakening to conversion (as purely an act of God) unbelief in the non-Christian who has not been called does not seem so absurd or inexplicable. Now, of course, we can say that in a sense it is absurd and inexplicable in that it is ultimately a hopeless, dismal and ineffective opposition to God's grace. But Barth, throughout hundreds of pages of the analysis of sin, seems to want to say more than this--to say that this man, whoever and wherever he is, is acting in an absurd and inexplicable way in his unbelief and is fully responsible for it. Surely such an approach on Barth's part does not mesh with his view of man's awakening to the movement of conversion.

A possible solution to this problem is to say that, in fact, Barth is only talking about "called" Christians in his doctrine; after all, he is a European writing primarily to the Western world. And certainly his concept of the absurd and inexplicable quality of unbelief does fit into his doctrine of the awakened Christian. This man is the one to whom God has made Himself known, and who yet, even in the midst of his faithfulness to Him, continually turns his back on Him (this will be discussed below). Here indeed unbelief might be attacked by Barth. But the interesting fact is that in page after page,

chapter after chapter, throughout his analysis of sin as pride and sloth, Barth does not make this distinction or does not say that in fact his doctrine is aimed at the awakened Christian.

Finally, however, in IV:3,1, Barth makes a few revealing statements that would seem to shed a great deal of light on his over-all idea of man's responsibility for sin. Here he writes that all men do indeed sin, but not by design or by deliberate intention.

Jesus Christ has not yet met all men. Not every man as yet exists in direct and immediate historical relation with Him. And it is only in these circumstances that the man of sin is revealed and expresses himself according to his true nature. Only here does falsehood reach maturity. Only here does he lie subjectively and not just objectively, actually and not just potentially, consciously, intentionally and by design and not just in fact. . . . Only here is he both guilty as a liar, which was always true, and also makes himself guilty, his lie being a responsible action of which he is well aware.¹³⁹

While speaking of the Christian who lies and deceives and ends up in a false situation, Barth remarks:

It is the same situation in which men exist whom Jesus Christ has not yet encountered to the extent that for some reason they have not yet been reached by the proclamation of the divine pardon. They, too, live as though Jesus Christ did not exist and the pardon issued and being issued in Him had no validity: . . . Falsehood as the specifically Christian form of sin thus has the first general result that, when the Christian transforms the truth revealed and proclaimed to him into untruth, he is betrayed . . . into the same situation as that from which he had to be redeemed as Jesus Christ encountered him. . . . He returns from the true situation disclosed to him to the untrue situation of 'heathenism.' The only thing is that the conditions under which man has to exist in it are undoubtedly made much more unpleasant for him by the fact that it is his falsehood which has placed him there. This cannot be said of the rest. It

¹³⁹ Barth, IV:3,1, 451.

is relatively in their favor that they have had no opportunity of changing the truth into untruth.¹⁴⁰

What these quotations seem to be saying is that the man not yet encountered by Christ is really involved in the sin of falsehood, but yet at the same time only potentially, i.e., not deliberately, not knowingly, and therefore not responsibly. But does this idea --that only the awakened Christian is responsible for unbelief and its results--also apply to pride and sloth? Unfortunately, Barth does not say. Logic would insist that it does, for if it does not, then either Barth's whole concept of the awakening to conversion and of revelation must be called into question, or we must settle for the fact that he is unconcerned about major inconsistencies and obscurities in his theology. This latter alternative may, in fact, be closer to the truth than this systematically-oriented American would like to admit!

Justification and Sanctification

In turning to Barth's understanding of the salvation of man, we already know basically what he has to say, namely, that all men are saved in Christ. We will see in this section how he deals with justification and sanctification within the context of this universal salvation.

Man insists on turning from God, on living in unbelief, thus making himself absurd and impossible. And this throws him into crisis because God will not accept his wrong.

¹⁴⁰ Barth, IV:3,1, 466-67.

For wrong is an outrage and abomination to God. It has to perish. The right of God confronts it with such majesty. It cannot exist before it. It is taken and burnt up and destroyed by the life of God like dry wood by the fire. This is the event of His righteousness. What takes place in it is the breaking of a catastrophe.¹⁴¹

But how shall man overcome the wrath of God, when he is so deeply involved in sinfulness? Even if one man really tasted and experienced in his suffering and death the judgement of God Himself, how could he experience it for all others? Furthermore, if all men suffered for their wrong as they deserve to do, how could they banish the offense from the world? And even if in suffering and death they were able to erase the blot, their destruction would make a lie of God's faithfulness to man. To satisfy His righteousness, man would have to be exterminated.¹⁴²

Thus, what we should suffer in accordance with the righteousness of God, He took upon Himself in Christ. In Christ God judged the world.

thus fully satisfying the righteousness Jesus of Nazareth, rendered the obedience of humility to the eternal Father, thus fully satisfying the righteousness of God on its negative side, the side of wrath.¹⁴³

Thus the satisfaction made by Christ pays the price for our sin and satisfies the righteousness of God. On the negative side of the process of justification, in Christ's death, we see that our justification has taken place. In the satisfaction He made, we see the destruction of the man of sin, who is now the man of

¹⁴¹Barth, IV:1, 539.

¹⁴²Ibid., IV:1, 553.

¹⁴³Ibid.

yesterday. In ourselves we know that this man of yesterday is still the man of today. But in Christ we know, nevertheless, that sinful man has been set aside.¹⁴⁴

On the positive side of justification, we see the introduction of the life of a new man righteous before God. Not only did Christ die, but He also rose again. God willed to introduce the new and righteous man and, therefore, He resurrected Christ. As Jesus was crucified for us, so God's answer to Him in respect to His obedient act also applies to us.

As He in His act of humility has carried through for all men the end to which we had all fallen victim, so for all men He has actually opened the gate of righteousness and life. His resurrection is the beginning from which we all come when we leave the past which He has concluded, going forward in Him to the future which is already present.¹⁴⁵

When we have died, then we will live as this righteous man revealed in the resurrection. Christ's innocence, manifested in the resurrection, will be our true innocence in the future.¹⁴⁶ But even now in the midst of our sin, we are justified and new men. We are still the old man, sinful "from top to toe," but also because of the divine pardon, we are, from top to toe, "the man who goes forward to the goal of his righteousness, who has indeed arrived, who is alive there as a righteous man." We are both at the goal of being new men, and yet also only at the beginning,

already righteous before God and yet still only a sinner, called to a complete and unreserved and unconditional certainty

¹⁴⁴Barth, IV:1, 552.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., IV:1, 556.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., IV:1, 554-56.

and comfort and joy, but also to a complete and unpreserved and unconditional humility and penitence. . . .¹⁴⁷

In sum, we are justified because in Christ's crucifixion our sinful past is behind us and in His resurrection a new future is before us. We already are the men we will be. Man is still sick, "but when this doctor comes he is already healed. The sheep is still lost, but when it is sought by this shepherd it is already found." We are still publicans and sinners, but because Christ has sat down to eat with us, we are already the holy people of God.¹⁴⁸

Barth stresses what is quite apparent in his thought: that faith plays no role in the actual justifying of man.¹⁴⁹ What faith does is to recognize, apprehend this justification freely given by God.¹⁵⁰ But faith does not merely apprehend a person's own justification; rather, it apprehends the justification of all men, even those without faith.¹⁵¹

We cannot speak of justification without speaking also of sanctification, states Barth. That he means this in all seriousness can be seen in the fact that even in his analysis of justification, he already speaks in terms of sanctification. When the doctor has come, we are healed even then. God accomplished both the justification and the sanctification of man in Christ; indeed justification and sanctification are simply two aspects of the

¹⁴⁷ Barth, IV:1, 576.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., IV:1, 592.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., IV:1, 616, 621.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., IV:1, 630.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., IV:1, 633-34.

same event of salvation though structurally, justification proceeds sanctification. Nevertheless, the sanctifying of man is really first in God's intention, and is, therefore, teleologically superior to justification.¹⁵²

Sanctification means "the creation of a new form of existence for man in which he can live as the loyal covenant-partner of God who is well-pleasing to and blessed by Him."¹⁵³ And this sanctification has taken place "de jure" for all men, though "de facto" it is not known by all, just as justification is not "de facto" known by all either. Actually, it is Christ who was truly sanctified by God, and our sanctification has taken place in Him and not because of any doing of our own.

For it was in the existence of this one, in Jesus Christ . . . that God Himself became man . . . in order to accomplish in His own person the conversion of man to Himself, his exaltation from the depth of his transgression and consequent misery, his liberation from his unholy being for service in the covenant, and therefore his sanctification.¹⁵⁴

Too often, says Barth, we see in Christ's humiliation our own justification but fail to see His exaltation to fellowship with God as our sanctification. Instead we attempt to make sanctification our own responsibility. Actually, all that is left for us who "de facto" know of sanctification

is simply to recognize and respect it with gratitude in that provisional praise, the offering of which is the reason for the existence of His people. . . . We are not sanctified by this recognition and respect, by the poor praise we offer. We are not saints because we make ourselves such. We are

¹⁵²Barth, IV:2, 501-508.

¹⁵³Ibid., IV:2, 514.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

saints and sanctified because we are already sanctified, already saints, in this One.¹⁵⁵

What, we might ask at this point, is the difference between those who know of this universal sanctification and those who do not? First we must realize that those who really know of it are those whom God has called to this awareness, those to whom God has spoken in the heart.¹⁵⁶ And these we may call saints. Not only do they know "de jure" of a universal sanctification in Christ, but this sanctification "has come on them 'de facto.'"¹⁵⁷ As a result, these persons are placed under Jesus' direction and witness to His holiness. The saints' existence "is affected and radically altered and re-determined by the fact that they receive direction in a particular address of the One who alone is holy."¹⁵⁸ The saint is still definitely a sinner, but now he is a "disturbed sinner." His sleep has been broken and he is no longer happy or contented in his sin.¹⁵⁹ A man's sanctification "de facto" is simply looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2)." As the saints look to Him and thereby lift up themselves, they have a part on earth "in the holiness in which He is the One who alone is holy."¹⁶⁰ Sanctification "de facto" involves an element of growth in the life of the saint.

But sanctification in conversion is not the affair of . . . individual moments; it is the affair of the totality of the whole life-movement of man. To live a holy life is

¹⁵⁵Barth, IV:2, 516.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., IV:2, 521.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., IV:2, 524.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., IV:2, 536-37.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., IV:2, 523.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., IV:2, 527.

to be raised and driven with increasing definiteness from the centre of this revealed truth, and therefore to live in conversion with growing sincerity, depth and precision.¹⁶¹

This man touched by the Holy Spirit repents, "boldly enterprises a new being, and affirms and apprehends himself in the future."¹⁶² He has entered into the life-movement of conversion.

But Barth will not entertain any idea of an approach to perfection in this life. The saint never reaches the point where he needs only to repent of "certain regrettable traces of his being and action of yesterday."¹⁶³ On the contrary, the man in the process of becoming a totally new man "is in his totality the old man of yesterday and the new man of tomorrow."¹⁶⁴

Barth lays emphasis on this fact that the Christian is both the old man and the new in his discussion of freedom. This ingredient in human life is not the ability to do anything one wishes, but rather the total commitment of self to God. We are most free when we are most completely slaves to God.¹⁶⁵ And when one has chosen for unbelief and entered into compact with chaos, he loses his freedom (to be committed to God).

His starting-point is the repudiation of his freedom. He cannot, therefore, do that which corresponds to his freedom. He necessarily does that which he could not do in the exercise of it. This is the bondage of the human will which is the bitterest characteristic of human misery.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Barth, IV:2, 566.

¹⁶² Ibid., IV:2, 570-71.

¹⁶³ Ibid., IV:2, 571-72.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., IV:2, 573-74.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., IV:2, 494.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., IV:2, 496.

But man's slavery apart from God has its limit in the mercy of God, who in Christ has set all men free. And through their awakening by the Holy Spirit, some are given a new direction to their lives here and now. The grip of the godless path which they have been treading is broken.

Conversion, and therefore life in this movement, means renewal. . . . Conversion means the turning on an axis. The life of the old man . . . also involves movement. But it has no axis--and that is why it is not engaged in conversion. It moves straight ahead, and this means straight ahead to the descent--the plunge--to death. . . . The difference between the life of the one who is engaged in conversion and that of others is not that the former moves itself, but that it has an axis on which to turn. It is . . . this axis which makes this man a new man, giving him a part in its own movement. But the axis which makes his life a movement in conversion is the reality that God is for man and therefore that he is for God.¹⁶⁷

Yet, even those who have this axis, who actually participate in Christian freedom do so only partially.

Freedom and bondage clash in one and the same man: his freedom as a new man in Jesus and in the Holy Spirit, and his bondage as an old man, outside Jesus, in and for himself, in the flesh in his past which is still present. . . .¹⁶⁸

Thus even he who is encountered by the Holy Spirit is not able simply to turn to God and to put complete faith in Him. This person is still caught in the clash between freedom and bondage, and he never will be able in this life to attain perfect freedom.

We see then that while Barth can write of growth in sanctification, his comments on the remaining sinfulness in man severely restrict the idea of growth. Indeed, the most accurate way to describe the saint is to say that he is a disturbed sinner

¹⁶⁷ Barth, IV:2, 560-61.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., IV:2, 496-97.

who has attained some freedom even in the midst of his bondage. He is at least aimed in the direction of God, though he proceeds in that direction only to the slightest degree. He has been awakened, and is in a lifelong movement of conversion.

But the saint will not be forever under the power of both sin and grace. He will become sanctified "in toto" in such a way that he is this alone, "excluding what he still is 'in toto' [i.e., in the bondage of sin]."¹⁶⁹ He and all others, too, will someday be totally sanctified, and sanctified alone!

To complete this discussion on sanctification we must add that the saint's purpose in being called is to serve as a witness to the power and love of God. Certainly the individual Christian gains some personal benefits from this new life of his. But to share in such benefits (for example: honor, joy, comfort, exaltation) is not the primary reason he has been called. The saints have been called primarily to a task.

What is this task? It is to be noted supremely that it is a divine and therefore a pure and genuine task. . . . And it consists in the fact that with their whole being, action, inaction and conduct, and then by word and speech, they have to make a definite declaration to other men. The essence of their vocation is that God makes them His witnesses. . . . They are witnesses of the God who . . . was, is and will be with His creation, the world and all men.¹⁷⁰

Over and again Barth hastens to add that in his witness it is not man who awakens others, but God alone. God needs no one, yet He wills not to be alone, not to be without His disciples as His

¹⁶⁹ Barth, IV:2, 573-74.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., IV:3,2 574-575. IV:3,1, and 2, deal extensively with conversion and the call of man to witness to God.

witnesses.

Even in His final manifestation He will not appear alone but with all His saints (1 Thess. 3:13). And so even here and now He wills to rely on, to make common cause and to compromise Himself with these curious saints called Christians by calling them as the Lord to His service.¹⁷¹

God has chosen freely, and not of necessity to use human agencies as "co-efficients" in awakening others, and to be such a "co-efficient" is the primary task of the Christian and is indeed the primary reason he has been made a Christian.¹⁷²

We conclude this study on an optimistic note because, in fact, Barth's doctrine of man is permeated with the proclamation of The Triumph of Grace (as Berkouwer has entitled his book on Barth). Man has been saved. He has nothing to fear ultimately, even his own death.

Just because the Christian hopes for the ultimate and definitive, he also hopes for the temporal and provisional. Just because he hopes with joy for the dawn of the great light, he hopes with provisional joy for the little lights, which may come and go, but which will not come and go in vain, since as a temporary illumination they will help him to look and move more properly towards that which they can only indicate, but which in their time they can in fact indicate. Just because he hopes for the Last Day, for the eternal year, he hopes for the next year, from which, whatever they may bring, he can always expect at least new indications of the coming of Jesus Christ.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Barth, IV:3,2, 656.

¹⁷²Ibid., IV:2, 557.

¹⁷³Ibid., IV:3,2, 938.

CHAPTER II

REINHOLD NIEBUHR'S DOCTRINE OF MAN AS SINNER

Introductory Remarks

As I explained in the Preface, this analysis of Niebuhr's thought is derived primarily from The Nature and Destiny of Man and The Self and the Dramas of History, because these books present the doctrine of man in a more systematic and complete manner than do his other works. Due to the importance of these two books, it is imperative to note that they are in disagreement with each other at some essential points. In The Self and the Dramas of History, Niebuhr has made a significant shift away from the position expounded in The Nature and Destiny of Man. I have analyzed this shift in the section entitled "Later Developments in Niebuhr's Thought." As a result, much of the material presented in the sections preceding this analysis, having been derived primarily from The Nature and Destiny of Man, does not accurately represent his later position. But because of the complexity of his thought in this earlier book, I think it is best to present first his position there and then to deal with the later developments in his thought, with emphasis on their relation to the earlier views.

To be more specific about the order of this chapter, the section immediately following these introductory remarks deals

with the uniqueness of man. Niebuhr has held a consistent view on this matter throughout his writings and I begin with a discussion of it so that the reader will be familiar, early in the chapter, with some of Niebuhr's basic assumptions about man. I then proceed to three sections dealing with Niebuhr's understanding of man as presented in The Nature and Destiny of Man. After this analysis comes a section devoted to the shift in his thought reflected in The Self and the Dramas of History. Finally, the last two sections are concerned with the consequences of sin and the meaning of justification and sanctification. Niebuhr's understanding of these matters has remained fairly consistent through the years, and as a result I will not have to divide his thought between earlier and later views in these sections.

The Uniqueness of Man

"Human life points beyond itself. But it must not make itself into that beyond. That were to commit the basic sin of man."¹ This is a central belief of Reinhold Niebuhr, and his writings, in large part, are an attempt to explain this belief, to draw out its implications, to show its complex relationships to the Christian message.

If a man insists he is only a child of nature and consequently should not pretend to be more than an animal, he is tacitly admitting "that he is, at any rate, a curious kind of animal who has both the inclination and capacity to make such

¹Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 158.

pretensions."² The fact is, says Niebuhr, that man is a spirit who can and does stand outside of nature, himself, his reason, and the world.³ Thus, the self can look upon itself, in self-consciousness, with the result that it "makes itself its own object in such a way that the ego is finally always subject and not object."⁴

But human life does not center completely in self-transcendence. Man is also creature, a finite being of this world.

The obvious fact is that man is a child of nature, subject to its vicissitudes, compelled by its necessities, driven by its impulses, and confined within the brevity of the years which nature permits its varied organic forms, allowing them some, but not too much, latitude.⁵

Thus we find a tension in our view of man. On the one hand we see that he has an ability to transcend himself, and, on the other hand, we see that he is nevertheless finite, subject to the vicissitudes of nature. It is Niebuhr's strong belief that we must hold this tension because when the tension breaks we find ourselves with a false view of man, finally degenerating into either a pure naturalism or pure idealism in which man is nothing but animal or nothing less than God.⁶

Certainly, as Christians we need not be ashamed of our finitude, since it is a Christian conviction that the world is

²Niebuhr, I, 1.

³Ibid., I, 3-4.

⁴Ibid., I, 14.

⁵Ibid., I, 3.

⁶Ibid., I, 4. Chapters I-IV deal with such tendencies in detail.

good because it was created by God and is sustained by Him. Indeed, the belief that God is immanent in the world points to the fact that there is nothing inherently evil about finite creation.⁷ But the fact that finitude in itself is not evil does not mean that we should look upon man as nothing but finite creature. This, as noted above, would destroy the tension we must hold in viewing man. For man has a transcendent aspect also, and it is this transcendent aspect in continual relationship to finitude that led to the Biblical affirmation that God created man after His image and in His likeness. Such an affirmation can be made only on the assumption that man is finite, because if he were not, he would not be in the image of God but would be God Himself. Furthermore, such an affirmation is possible only because of the fact that man is capable of transcending his finitude and thus of being open to the possibility of confrontation with God.

Niebuhr is opposed to the Greek understanding of the image of God in man, which equated the divine element in man with his "reason." Aristotle defined the rational capacity as the ability to conceive universals, to make conceptual images. And reason, both for Aristotle and those following him, included the logical and analytical faculties of the mind. Niebuhr agrees that the rational faculty is indeed a part of what makes man the image of God.⁸ But man in the image of God includes more than reason.

⁷Niebuhr, I, 13.

⁸Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 3.

Reason in itself has no power over man. It cannot, for example, compel consistency, though it may have the power to detect inconsistency.⁹ In short, "it is important to note that the self is always the master, and not the servant, of its reason."¹⁰ Thus, the self has a freedom beyond its rational capacities and "can subordinate its reason to its desires, often making its desires all the more dangerous within society."¹¹ And this freedom or transcendence over nature and rational capacity is what makes man the image of God. Niebuhr believes Heidegger perfectly sums up this Christian emphasis when he speaks of "the idea of transcendence, namely, that man is something which reaches beyond itself, that he is more than a rational creature."¹²

Knowledge of God and the Power of Conscience

Because the self transcends the world and thus sees that everything within the world is finite, it seeks a meaning in life that also transcends the world. It seeks this meaning because it realizes that the finite cannot give ultimate meaning to finite existence.

The real situation is that man who is made in the image of God is unable, precisely because of those qualities in him

⁹Niebuhr, p. 13.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹Ibid., p. 20. "Man fights his battles with instruments in which mind has sharpened nature's claws; and his ferocities are more sustained than those of the natural world, where they are prompted only by the moods and the necessities of the moment. . . . Man's lusts are fed by his imagination." Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, p. 44.

¹²Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 162.

that are designated as 'image of God,' to be satisfied with a god who is made in man's image. By virtue of his capacity for self-transcendence he can look beyond himself sufficiently to know that a projection of himself is not God.¹³

Niebuhr expresses the belief, in The Nature and Destiny of Man, that since men transcend both nature and mind, they have, "in some fashion, the experience of a reality beyond themselves."¹⁴ Because they realize in moments of self-transcendence that nothing finite can explain and give meaning to life, they look beyond finitude for such an explanation. And this search beyond finitude makes possible private or general revelation. Actually, man does not simply make an intellectual decision to search for infinite meaning, as might be inferred from the above statements. Rather, he feels a "pull" from beyond finitude, a power transcending his transcendence. This power from beyond is felt as "the sense of being commanded, placed under obligation and judged" and is a "universal human experience."¹⁵

This general experience of being confronted from beyond can be divided into three elements which correctly express this general experience in more concrete terms. The first element contains the sense of reverence for and dependence upon an ultimate source of being. The second contains the sense of moral obligation laid upon one from beyond oneself (that is, from the ultimate source of being) and the sense of moral unworthiness before a judge. The third contains the longing for forgiveness.

¹³Niebuhr, I, 166.

¹⁴Ibid., I, 127.

¹⁵Ibid., I, 129.

Within the context of Judeo-Christian faith, through special revelation, the first element comes to deal with God as Creator, the second with God as Judge, and the third with God as Redeemer. Within the Old Testament, God is clearly seen as Creator and Judge, but, according to Niebuhr, it never solved the problem of how a judging God can also redeem. Only in Christ is this problem solved.¹⁶

Without the special revelation of the Judeo-Christian faith the general revelation of God becomes falsified, "because it is explained merely as man facing the court of social approval or disapproval or as facing his own 'best self.'"¹⁷ Yet, even the person without faith in God senses that he should have faith, that he should be without the anxiety that comes from standing alone. The very nature of man (his "essential nature," as Niebuhr puts it) demands that he live in faith, hope, and love, and when he does not, his nature stands over against him in judgment.¹⁸

Niebuhr argues, in Nature and Destiny of Man, that because we have the experience of God confronting us at the limits of our freedom, we have the faculty of conscience. General revelation leaves man with the sense of being commanded, placed under obligation, and judged. The Christian knows that this experience of conscience is primarily a result of confrontation with God.

¹⁶Niebuhr, I, 131-32.

¹⁷Ibid., I, 130.

¹⁸Ibid., I, 271-72.

The significance of the Biblical interpretation of conscience lies precisely in this, that a universal human experience, the sense of being commanded, placed under obligation and judged is interpreted as a relation between God and man in which it is God who makes demands and judgments upon man.¹⁹

It should be pointed out that Niebuhr also offers a slightly different view of conscience in this same book. He states that man's essential nature requires of him that he live in faith, hope and love, and when he fails to do so, this essential nature stands over against him in judgment. And this judgment of his essential nature against himself, when he fails to fulfill its requirements, is his conscience. In this analysis conscience is defined without specific appeal to man's relation to God.

The particular content of the voice of conscience is of course conditioned by all the relativities of history. . . . Yet even in its content the universalities of conscience are at least as significant as its varieties and relativities. One must conclude that the real structure of life, the dependence of man upon his fellow men for instance, which requires both organic and loving relations between them asserts itself, in spite of all errors, against the confusion which human egotism and pride introduces into the relations of men.²⁰

Such a view of conscience leads necessarily to the conviction that it is not only the religious person, in his confrontation with God, who feels the pangs of conscience. Rather, all men have this experience because their essential nature places the demand upon them that they live in love, or at least in mutual dependence with their fellow men, and judges them when they fail to do so. And this means that it is possible to speak of

¹⁹ Niebuhr, I, 129.

²⁰ Ibid., I, 275.

awareness of sin outside a strictly religious context.

However, Niebuhr does not elaborate on the implications of this concept of conscience in The Nature and Destiny of Man. Indeed, he treats the concept itself in only a secondary manner. His emphasis falls on that view of conscience involving conscious confrontation with God, and it is the implications of this view that bear the weight of his elaborations.

We now have studied some of Niebuhr's basic assumptions about man: that he is self-transcendent, that he experiences confrontation with God, and that he possesses a conscience. As we proceed to an analysis of his concept of sin, the importance of these assumptions will become apparent.

The Causes and Meaning of Sin

Because man realizes that he is finite and yet transcends finitude, he is left with a feeling of insecurity. In his transcendence he discovers that he has a degree of freedom over natural events, while yet being bound to nature. Thus he finds himself in the paradox of freedom and finitude. And the tension of this paradox leads to anxiety. Because man rises above nature, he knows he is more than creature; because he is still in nature, he knows (in moments of self-transcendence) that he is less than God. Thus he finds himself without the security of being either God or creature, and as a result, his life is permeated with anxiety, a generalized fear derived from his basic insecurity. Man knows he will die and that even before death he may be

confronted with all sorts of misfortunes. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, he senses that meaninglessness and chaos are close behind him.²¹

Niebuhr argues that this anxiety caused by the condition of man is not sin but rather the precondition of sin. Man cannot live with intense anxiety, and so he must do something about the contingency, the insecurity of life. The ideal possibility is "that faith would purge anxiety of the tendency toward sinful self-assertion," that faith in the ultimate security of God's love would overcome all immediate insecurities of nature and history.²² But such faith is not found, at least not in such fulness and perfection, and so man turns to sinful ways of dealing with his insecurity.

When anxiety has conceived it brings forth both pride and sensuality. Man falls into pride, when he seeks to raise his contingent existence to unconditioned significance; he falls into sensuality, when he seeks to escape from his unlimited possibilities of freedom, from the perils and responsibilities of self-determination, by losing himself in some natural vitality.²³

Niebuhr believes that Biblical and Christian thought has rightly maintained, with a fair degree of consistency, that pride is the primary sin. Man sees the contingency of his life, but he cannot live with this fact, and so he tries to deny it by pretending to be more than he is. Niebuhr sees three main types of pride: pride of power, pride of knowledge, and pride of virtue

²¹Niebuhr, I, 179-86.

²²Ibid., I, 183.

²³Ibid., I, 186.

(leading to spiritual pride).²⁴ Whatever type of pride one exhibits usually contains an element of ignorance. The proud monarch, for example, has perhaps been powerful so long that he has, to some extent, forgotten his own weaknesses. But yet, insists Niebuhr, at the core of a man's pride is the realization that he is limited and finite, living a contingent life. Niebuhr speaks of this mixture of knowledge and ignorance in referring to the fact that

the pride of intellect is derived on the one hand from ignorance of the finiteness of the human mind and on the other hand from an attempt to obscure the known conditioned character of human knowledge and the taint of self-interest in human truth.²⁵

Such a mixture of ignorance and knowledge is not limited to intellectual pride, but can be found in all types of pride.

So then, to overcome the anxiety caused by the paradox of finitude and freedom, man usually tries to break the paradox by denying his limitations, by claiming absolute purity of heart, or possession of the final truth, or the right to and possession of power and glory. But in making such claims, he is always left with an uneasy conscience. In moments of self-transcendence he at least dimly realizes that he is claiming more than he deserves. But he feels he must resist this realization.

Man loves himself inordinately. Since his determined existence does not deserve the devotion lavished upon it, it is obviously necessary to practice some deception in order to justify such excessive devotion. While such deception is constantly directed against competing wills, seeking to secure their acceptance and validation of the self's too generous

²⁴Niebuhr, I, 188-203.

²⁵Ibid., I, 194-95.

opinion of itself, its primary purpose is to deceive, not others, but the self. The self must at any rate deceive itself first.²⁶

Because we do have a conscience that speaks to us when we transgress the law of love, or at least of mutual dependence, the pretensions of the self are, ultimately, maintained only by willful deception.

Niebuhr observes that we are much more eager to condemn sins of sensuality than sins of pride, because sins of sensuality are more evident, and because our own uneasiness about pride makes us unwilling to expose it too clearly. In fact, Niebuhr writes, sin as sensuality is secondary to sin as pride. Outside of Hellenistic theology, "with its inclination to make sensuality the primary sin . . . we must arrive at the conclusion that Christian theology . . . regards sensuality as a derivation of the more primal sin of self-love."²⁷ But this leads to the question of whether the drunkard or glutton merely presses self-love to the limit or whether he tries to escape from himself through lack of moderation. Niebuhr believes that there is a little of both elements in sensuality, though in any given moment one or the other is dominant.²⁸ To explain what he means, he analyzes the emotions involved in drunkenness and in sex. The drunkard sometimes seeks the abnormal stimulus of alcohol in order that he might experience a sense of power and importance he otherwise does not experience. But then again drunkenness may

²⁶Niebuhr, I, 203.

²⁷Ibid., I, 232-33.

²⁸Ibid., I, 233-35.

be desired "not in order to enhance the ego but to escape from it."²⁹ The first purpose of intoxication is to enable the ego sinfully to assert itself in an attempt to deal with its anxiety. And this effort creates the circumstances under which intoxication becomes the means of escape from self. The second purpose of intoxication, therefore, springs from the sense of guilt, or a state of perplexity in which a sense of guilt has been compounded with the previous sense of insecurity.³⁰ Anxiety first tempts the self to sin through ego-assertion, and this sin only increases the insecurity it was intended to alleviate, until finally "some escape from the whole tension of life is sought."³¹

This same dual purpose can be seen in sexual passion, because "it contains both a further extension of the sin of self-love and an effort to escape from it. . . ."³²

Thus, when man loses the true center of his life, in God, he tries to make himself a god, and he uses sensuality as one means to self-assertion. But this leads to greater and greater insecurity and confusion, so that he then has to turn to sensuality as a means of escape from the whole confusing situation.³³

Responsibility for Sin

But is man responsible for his sin? Can he be held answerable for it? After all, he does live in the paradox of

²⁹Niebuhr, I, 234.

³⁰Ibid., I, 234-35.

³¹Ibid., I, 235.

³²Ibid., I, 237.

³³Ibid., I, 239-40.

freedom and finitude, and, considering the anxiety this causes within him, how can he avoid falling into sinful self-assertion and efforts to escape? Niebuhr points out that the classical Christian doctrine of sin is seemingly absurd in its insistence that

man sins inevitably and by a fateful necessity, but that he is nevertheless to be held responsible for actions which are prompted by an ineluctable fate.³⁴

Nevertheless, he feels both inevitability and responsibility must be held in tension. He remarks several times that insecurity does not of necessity lead to sin.

For the general insecurity of man and the special sense of inferiority of his class and nation do not lead necessarily to the excessive self-assertion in which he is involved.³⁵

Niebuhr elaborates on the complexity of the problem of responsibility for sin in pointing out that surely the Nazi who gives unqualified devotion to the qualified is not making a consciously perverse choice of the lesser good over the higher good. But at the same time, who would be willing to absolve the Nazi of his responsibility, just because his choice is not consciously perverse?³⁶ This leads Niebuhr to argue that one sins both consciously and unconsciously, and the degree of conscious choice varies in specific instances. Yet, even conscious choices do not come "completely into the category of conscious perversity." Even particular acts of cruelty are probably not the result of conscious love of evil. They are, rather,

³⁴ Niebuhr, I, 239-40.

³⁵ Ibid., I, 249.

³⁶ Ibid.

the consequences of sin's pathetic vicious circle. The attempt to maintain one's own pride and self-respect by holding others in contempt adds an uneasy conscience to the general insecurity which the attitude of contempt is meant to alleviate.³⁷

In other words, when one fails to subject himself to God, he stands alone on the brink of meaninglessness, and his anxiety becomes unbearable. Consequently, in a desperate attempt to protect and preserve himself, he asserts himself in pride, claiming more for himself than he should. This causes him to feel uneasy in his conscience and forces him to assert himself even more to mitigate his feeling of uneasiness. Thus he becomes caught-up in a vicious circle that causes even greater insecurity, which may lead him, ultimately, to an attempt to escape the whole anxious situation by losing himself in sensuality. Now once he has entered into this vicious circle, he obviously is not conscious of every perverse act he commits. Hence, Niebuhr argues, "the actual sin follows more inevitably from the bias toward sin than is usually assumed."³⁸ And this bias toward sin, which Niebuhr calls original sin, is anxiety plus unbelief. Sin, in fact, presupposes itself; our sinful acts are already preceded by the mixture of unbelief and anxiety, which creates such a despairing situation that recourse to pride or sensuality is an overpowering temptation.³⁹ Consequently, there is less freedom in the actual sin than is usually supposed, while there is more

³⁷Niebuhr, I, 250.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., I, 251.

responsibility for original sin than is generally recognized.

"If man knew, loved and obeyed God as the author and end of his existence," says Niebuhr, "a proper limit would be set for his desires, including the natural impulse of survival."⁴⁰ But the self lacks the faith and trust to subject itself to God, and instead seeks to establish itself independently. So then, once a person commits the prior sin of unbelief, the anxiety of freedom drives him into that vicious circle in which he unconsciously commits many actual sins.⁴¹

Before we can pursue the question of responsibility any further, we must first look into the two dimensions of sin in Niebuhr's thought. Hans Hofmann, in his study of Niebuhr, says that Niebuhr is

incapable of satisfying himself in the usual theological fashion by defining sin as a matter between man and God, admitting that it has certain results in man's relations with his fellowmen, but assuming that such results are not theologically important.⁴²

Hofmann rightly states that in Niebuhr's thought "faith and society are the poles of the original state of man. A disturbance of this dual polarity produces a disturbance in the nature of man. . . ."⁴³

There is a vertical and a horizontal dimension in Niebuhr's concept of sin, as it is analyzed in Nature and Destiny of Man.

The Bible defines sin in both religious and moral terms. The religious dimension of sin is man's rebellion against

⁴⁰ Niebuhr, I, 253.

⁴¹ Ibid., I, 251-53.

⁴² Hofmann, p. 102.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 163.

God, his effort to usurp the place of God. The moral and social dimension of sin is in justice.⁴⁴

Niebuhr gives the religious aspect of sin special emphasis in writing:

The real essence of sin can be understood only in the vertical dimension of the soul's relation to God because the freedom of the self stands outside all relations, and therefore has no other judge but God. It is for this reason that a profound insight into the character of sin must lead to the confession, 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight (Ps. 51)!'⁴⁵

But this is not to say that Niebuhr in any way plays down the moral or social aspect of sin. A great deal of his analysis of sin in Nature and Destiny of Man is primarily concerned with man's sinful relationship to his fellow men. But it is important to understand that in this book it is the vertical dimension of sin--rebellion against God--that gives rise to the social dimension. It is unbelief, or lack of trust in God, that leads to prideful self-assertion over fellow man: "The anxiety of freedom leads to sin only if the prior sin of unbelief is assumed."⁴⁶

Now we must turn back once again to the problem of responsibility. If Niebuhr has been correctly interpreted in these pages, if in fact he does look upon rebellion against God as the primary sin, leading to sins in the social dimension, then we must question whether, in fact, he has kept the tension between the poles of responsibility and inevitability, or whether he has

⁴⁴Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 179.

⁴⁵Ibid., I, 256-58.

⁴⁶Ibid., I, 252.

to some extent undermined the pole of responsibility. In fairness to Niebuhr, we must remember that he does not offer us a Pelagian view of responsibility. Responsibility, in Niebuhr's thought, is in paradoxical relation to inevitability. He is resisting Pelagian ideas when he says:

The sin of each individual is preceded by Adam's sin One may . . . not escape the paradoxical conclusion that the situation of finiteness and freedom would not lead to sin if sin were not already introduced into the situation.⁴⁷

There is then, because of the presence of sin preceding our sin, a real element of inevitability in our sinfulness. And yet, adds Niebuhr,

sin can never be traced merely to the temptation arising from a particular situation or condition in which man as man finds himself or in which particular men find themselves. Nor can the temptation which is compounded of a situation of finiteness and freedom, plus the fact of sin, be regarded as leading necessarily to sin in the life of each individual, if again sin is not first presupposed in that life. For this reason even the knowledge of inevitability does not extinguish the sense of responsibility.⁴⁸

In the final analysis, despite the factors leading to the inevitability of sin, Niebuhr holds to man's responsibility, his accountability for choosing pride or self-assertion rather than faith and trust in God. There are, in his thought, no neat cause and effect patterns in the life of man that absolutely force him into the life of pride. There is an element of responsible choice in this movement (though again, it is in paradoxical relation to inevitability).

It's [the self's] contemplation of its [sinful] act

⁴⁷ Niebuhr, I, 253-54.

⁴⁸ Ibid., I, 254.

involves both the discovery and the reassertion of its freedom. It discovers that some degree of conscious dishonesty accompanied the act, which means that the self was not deterministically and blindly involved in it. Its discovery of that fact in contemplation is a further degree of the assertion of freedom that is possible in the moment of action.⁴⁹

Hofmann, in speaking of Niebuhr's concept of sin, says that sin is ultimately as inexplicable as it is inevitable, that it is "the final, almost unbelievable denial by man of the basis of his own existence."⁵⁰ Niebuhr, to my knowledge, does not use terms such as "inexplicable" and "unbelievable," but yet these words do seem to describe his view of the fact that man chooses self-security rather than trust in God. Ideally, man would choose trust in God, but in fact he does not, and why he does not can never be explained fully. Man has radical freedom, and in this freedom he continually chooses pride rather than submission to his Creator. And no explanation can entirely grasp the reasons man uses his freedom in this way.

It is at this point, concerning the possibility of man's commitment to God and thus his assuming of a degree of responsibility, that Niebuhr is perhaps most vulnerable in his concept of sin as presented in Nature and Destiny of Man. The two poles of responsibility and inevitability can be kept in paradoxical relation only on the assumption that all men do experience, or at least have the opportunity to experience, the reality of God and can thus put their trust in Him. In Niebuhr's statements on

⁴⁹ Niebuhr, I, 255.

⁵⁰ Hofmann, pp. 196-98.

general revelation, he does, in fact, want to substantiate this assumption. But even here he severely qualifies the possibility of real confrontation with God through general revelation, without the aid of the special revelation of Judeo-Christian religion.

Without the principle of interpretation furnished by this 'special revelation' the general experience or the general revelation involved in conscience becomes falsified, because it is explained merely as man facing the court of social approval or disapproval or facing his own 'best self.'⁵¹

Furthermore, Niebuhr is well aware that there are different kinds of religions, offering radically different views of the supreme being or object of highest devotion. And in some of these religions, commitment to this object means ego-assertion or self-annihilation. I do not get the impression from reading Niebuhr, in his dealings with these religions, that he really believes persons raised in their environment under ordinary circumstances are confronted through general revelation by the God of Christian faith in such a vivid way that they then have the live option of putting their trust in Him.⁵² In short, while Niebuhr does offer a sketchy view of general revelation, he does not seem able to push it to the point of saying that all men everywhere do actually have the possibility of putting their trust in the God worshipped in the Christian faith. But if this is so, could it not be argued that he has undermined the concept of responsibility in terms of the non-Christian? If some men do not experience the

⁵¹Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 130.

⁵²See, for example, Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, Chapter 12.

reality of God in such a way as to be able to put their trust in Him, then, Niebuhr's categories of thought, there would seem to be no room for responsibility in their turning to pride, to ego-assertion.

Again, it must be stressed that Niebuhr certainly does not believe the person who has the possibility of putting trust in God thereby has complete freedom to do so. He insists upon the paradox of responsibility and inevitability. My question simply is whether he has, in fact, supported his case for general revelation.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Niebuhr has, in recent years, shifted away from viewing sin as unbelief. But before dealing with this shift I would like to refer to some comments of Niebuhr which point to the way he, before his shift, might have attempted to defend the view he put forward in The Nature and Destiny of Man, especially in face of such criticisms as I have offered. These comments emphasize the idea that grace comes to men in many ways and forms, that man may be the receiver of God's love and strength in ways that transcend the definitions of orthodoxy, that by-pass institutional religion. The following quotations are of this nature.

A 'hidden Christ' operates in history. And there is always the possibility that those who do not know the historical revelation may achieve a more genuine repentance and humility than those who do. If this is not kept in mind, the Christian faith easily becomes a new vehicle of pride.⁵³

⁵³Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 109-10.

If we examine any individual life . . . it becomes apparent that there are infinite possibilities of organizing life from beyond the centre of the self; and equally infinite possibilities of drawing the self back into the centre of the organization. The former possibilities are always fruits of grace (though frequently it is the 'hidden Christ' and a grace which is not fully known which initiates the miracle).⁵⁴

'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' said Jesus to Nicodemus, and that is a picturesque description of the freedom of divine grace in history, working miracles without any 'by your leave' of priest or church.⁵⁵

The mercies of God, for both the prophets and Jesus, were also revealed in nature and history and were not, as in later Christian orthodoxy, revealed purely in supernatural acts.⁵⁶

In normal life consistent self-destruction through self-seeking . . . is prevented by the various forces of 'common grace' which serve to draw the self out of itself. These family and communal responsibilities, affections, disciplines and pressures are related to the agape, as the ultimate norm. . . . Consequently the highest forms of self-realization are those which are the fruit of some movement of 'grace' which draws the self out of itself despite itself into the love of God and the neighbor.⁵⁷

These quotations present the possibility that the earlier Niebuhr would have argued that even though one might not be consciously aware of confrontation with God, he still can receive grace as judgment and power in "unorthodox" ways to such a degree that he is not simply fated to be driven to sin by the blind propelling force of anxiety. Also, as has been seen, Niebuhr writes that even the non-religious (and the religious non-Christian) can have some awareness of their sin, and can morally improve, although to a less significant degree than can the

⁵⁴Niebuhr, II, 123.

⁵⁵Ibid., II, 208.

⁵⁶Niebuhr, Essays in Applied Christianity, p. 159.

⁵⁷Niebuhr, Faith and History, pp. 174-75.

Christian believer whose pride is shattered in confrontation with God. The following quotation deserves to be repeated.

If we examine any individual life . . . it becomes apparent that there are infinite possibilities of organizing life from beyond the centre of the self; and equally infinite possibilities of drawing the self back into the centre of the organization. The former possibilities are always fruits of grace (though frequently it is the 'hidden Christ' and a grace which is not fully known which initiates the miracle).⁵⁸

Also relevant here is this comment:

As freedom develops, both good and evil develop with it. The innocent state of trust develops into the anxieties and fears of freedom; and these prompt the individual and the community to seek an unjust security at the expense of others. On the other hand it is possible that the same freedom may prompt larger and larger structures of brotherhood in human society. This brotherly relation of life with life is most basically the 'law of life.' It alone does justice to the freedom of the human spirit and the mutual dependence of men upon each other, their necessity of fulfilling themselves in each other.⁵⁹

He goes on to qualify this last quoted statement by adding that without the agape of Christian faith, brotherhood degenerates. Yet he does make clear here that man in general has the possibility of some moral improvement. Another quotation pointing in this same direction says:

A tragic and revealing aspect of the experience of the Christian ages is that, again and again, 'publicans and sinners' have had to rescue an important aspect of truth about life, and restore wholesomeness into human relations, against the fanaticism of Christian saints. . . .⁶⁰

Thus, by speaking of a hidden Christ or strange grace,

⁵⁸ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 123.

⁵⁹ Ibid., II, 95-96.

⁶⁰ Ibid., II, 122.

and the responsibility of all men, Niebuhr could perhaps have attempted to hold together his paradox of responsibility and inevitability. But this is speculation and, in the last analysis, we must simply face the fact that Niebuhr's thought on the doctrine of sin as presented in The Nature and Destiny of Man is incomplete at some important points.

Later Developments in Niebuhr's Thought

Because of the incompleteness of his earlier doctrine of sin, it is of special interest to note that in Faith and History and The Self and the Dramas of History, there is a shift in Niebuhr's thinking, which is most obvious in the latter of these two books. Niebuhr himself does not speak of any shift in these works, but under careful scrutiny a definite shift is apparent. I find it somewhat difficult to outline his restatement of the doctrine of sin, as seen in these later books, because he does not elaborate in any detailed fashion his more recent view. But yet, some statements referring to the doctrine of sin are explicit enough to allow us to see at least the general direction of this view, a view that I believe resolves some of the problems inherent in his older position.

As I have argued above, in The Nature and Destiny of Man, Niebuhr has difficulty in calling all men sinners in a meaningful, intelligible way because he defined the primary sin as unbelief. And he was never quite able to argue conclusively and convincingly that for all men knowledge of God is a live option. But now, in

The Self and the Dramas of History, Niebuhr has shifted his definition of the primary sin from unbelief to excessive self-concern. In his earlier view, original sin was defined as anxiety plus unbelief. In The Self and the Dramas of History, it is "the universal inclination of the self to be more concerned with itself than to be embarrassed by its undue claims."⁶¹ Over and again, Niebuhr speaks of sin as self-love, egocentricity, playing God.⁶² Now, of course, egocentricity is an affront to God, because it is man's attempt to usurp His rights and powers. Consequently, there still remains a religious as well as a social dimension to sin. But while sin is an affront to God's majesty, it still remains sin as egocentricity even apart from unbelief.

Because Niebuhr has dropped the definition of sin in terms of unbelief and now defines it essentially as narrow self-centeredness, he is in a better position to speak of the sin of the non-Jew and non-Christian. Egocentricity is something that transcends the boundaries of any particular religion. And such a definition provides a real "point of contact" with the non-Christian. And, in Niebuhr's categories of thought, there can be a real point of contact because all men have conscience. I have already discussed this phenomenon earlier in the chapter and pointed out that in The Nature and Destiny of Man, Niebuhr, while concentrating on a concept of conscience involving conscious

⁶¹Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 18.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 100, 134, 156, 121.

confrontation with God, also put forward a definition of conscience lacking specific appeal to man's relation to God. This latter view is that advocated in The Self and the Dramas of History.

The 'content' of conscience is obviously very relative to time and place. Yet the minimal terms of our obligations to our neighbors, incorporated, for instance, in the prohibition of murder, theft, adultery, are fairly universal. . . . Perhaps it would be correct to surmise that the universalities of the 'moral law' are derived from intuitions of the self about the essential nature of its selfhood. To this essential nature belong, on the one hand, its social nature. The self would therefore feel obligated to conform to the 'law' written into its nature, including the law of love or the law which is derived from the mutual dependence of persons.⁶³

The self, Niebuhr affirms, "recognizes the other as the limit of its expansiveness."⁶⁴ This view of conscience, applicable to all men, religious and non-religious alike, enables Niebuhr to argue effectively that when man claims more for himself than he as one man among many should claim, he feels the pangs of his conscience. Thus, whether a man believes in God or not, the Christian can talk to him about the reality of sin in terms of self-centeredness. It should be pointed out however, that Niebuhr continues to argue that only in dialogue with God do we seriously face the true proportions of our sin.⁶⁵ Without confrontation with God, our awareness of our own sin is quite vague, though we do see clearly the reality of egotism in those

⁶³Niebuhr, p. 14.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 32.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 233.

around us.⁶⁶

When we turn to Niebuhr's view of responsibility in The Self and the Dramas of History, we find he no longer emphasizes anxiety concerning finitude as the propelling force behind sin. He does not exclude anxiety arising from the "fragmentary character of life" from being a motivating influence in man's prideful self-assertion, but he does not present such anxiety as so all important as he did in his earlier view.⁶⁷ Essentially he seems now to want simply to point to the universality of sin, which can be empirically verified by common sense, and to say that this universal inclination to self-concern is "something of a mystery," that is, it can never be fully explained causally.⁶⁸ Of course, in The Nature and Destiny of Man, man's sinfulness was seen as something of a mystery too, because it could not be fully explained why man refuses to put his trust in God. But now, in The Self and the Dramas of History, the mystery is heightened because Niebuhr no longer emphasizes the power of anxiety concerning finitude that tempts man to pride. Now he prefers to speak simply of man's radical freedom as self-transcendent spirit, a radical freedom continually choosing self-centeredness as a way of life. He is extremely critical of those systems of thought that seek to explain man's behavior within a

⁶⁶ Niebuhr, p. 224. See also Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 124.

⁶⁷ Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 237.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 18, 134, 156, 157.

causal framework and that thus end up advocating determinism. The modern assumption that man is a determined being has led to a "preoccupation with particular causes of particular forms of egotism" that fails to grasp the freedom of the self.⁶⁹ Niebuhr feels much of this deterministic thinking is due to Freudianism, which, however skillful in dealing with the maladjusted, has failed to grasp the fact that "the individual is creatively involved in the historic situations of which he is also the creature and victim."⁷⁰ Although all people are partially determined, and intense psychological problems greatly reduce the freedom and resultant responsibility of some, yet common sense tells us that man is essentially free.

When we say 'the self's freedom,' this 'fact' is interpreted in common-sense terms as the self's ability to determine its actions, despite the determining influences upon those actions in the environment, and despite the possible inhibiting forces in its own 'sub-rational' nature upon the power of its will. This freedom is never absolute; but the common sense of all the ages, free of metaphysical subtleties, has agreed to define this freedom in terms of holding the self responsible for its actions. Despite all modern scientific or metaphysical deterministic theories, the jurisprudence of the world has never varied in assuming a responsible freedom of the self, though 'insanity' may be recognized by law as limiting responsibility; and presumably psychopathological derangements, short of insanity, might be recognized as limiting responsibility, if not in law then certainly in popular opinion. Furthermore, a charitable survey of the determining influences upon the life and actions of a delinquent child, for instance, will qualify the severity with which responsibility is apportioned. But these qualifications do not seriously challenge the general assumption that the self is in possession of a responsible freedom.⁷¹

⁶⁹Niebuhr, p. 142.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp. 143-44.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 128.

Perhaps Niebuhr best sums up his thinking on this matter when he says in Faith and History that

a scientific age will seek, and also find, specific reasons and causes for the jealousy of children, or the power lusts in mature individuals, or the naive egotism of even the saintly individual, or the envies and hatreds which infect all human relations. The discovery of specific causes of specific forms of these evils has obscured and will continue to obscure the profounder truth, that all men, saints and sinners, the righteous and the unrighteous, are inclined to use the freedom to transcend time, history, and themselves in such a way as to make themselves the false centre of existence.⁷²

Thus, specific causes of specific forms of behavior can sometimes be found, but such explaining can never comprehend the radical freedom of man in the self-centered stance he continually takes. The inclination to take this stance remains "something of a mystery."

Though Niebuhr has made a shift in his view of sin, inevitability and responsibility are still present, as he makes clear in explaining the positive message of the myth of the Fall. "The Biblical myth seeks to do justice both to the universality of sin and self-regard and to the element of personal responsibility in each sinful act."⁷³ Sin is inevitable, in that it is universal; no one escapes the taint of egocentricity. And yet, the element of responsibility is present. Man has radical freedom; he is not an automaton. He chooses to assert himself pridefully, and any system of thought that attempts to explain his choosing solely in a causal, deterministic manner fails to

⁷²Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 122.

⁷³Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 99.

grasp his radical freedom above the biological, causal plane of existence.

Thus we are left with the somewhat mysterious, or better, incomprehensible fact that all men, in their radical freedom, do in fact claim too much for themselves, leaving them with a vaguely uneasy feeling of guilt that becomes real and shattering in confrontation with God.⁷⁴

The Consequences of Sin

We must now turn briefly to Niebuhr's view of the Fall and the consequences of sinfulness in human life. He is very much opposed to the Reformation idea that man after the Fall is totally depraved. The very fact that man in contemplation has an uneasy conscience about the claims he has made proves that this is not the case.⁷⁵ Likewise, he rejects the Catholic doctrine that in the Fall all that man lost was something not essential to him (a "donum supernaturale") and therefore escaped any corruption of his essence.⁷⁶ He argues that to understand the consequences of the Fall correctly we must see it as a vertical, not horizontal relation. Rather than make it an event in history, we should look upon it as "a symbol of an aspect of every historical moment in the life of man."⁷⁷ And we should, furthermore, understand it in relation to the essential

⁷⁴Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 124.

⁷⁵Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, 266.

⁷⁶Ibid., I, 268-69.

⁷⁷Ibid., I, 269.

nature of man.

The essential nature of man (which is his "organic perfection") contains two elements. On the one hand, it contains

all his natural endowments and determinations, his physical and social impulses, his sexual and racial differentiations --in short his character as a creature imbedded in the natural order.

On the other hand, it contains

the freedom of his spirit, his transcendence over natural process and finally his self-transcendence.⁷⁸

It is this second element with which we are most concerned, because it is here that we find corruption at its worst. The virtues corresponding to this second element are analogous to the "theological virtues" of Catholic thought, namely faith, hope and love. Niebuhr argues that the knowledge of God is not a supernatural grace beyond man's essential nature but is "the requirement of his nature as free spirit."⁷⁹ Without faith in God and a resultant hope for the future grounded in that faith, man is overwhelmed with anxiety. Consequently, he is unable truly to love his fellow men. And without love--without "I-Thou" relationships--man's spirit is dulled. Thus we see in opposition to Catholic doctrine that these closely interrelated virtues--faith, hope and love--are a requirement of man's essential nature.⁸⁰ And we also see, contrary to much Protestant theology, that man's essential nature is not totally corrupt, "that sin is

⁷⁸Niebuhr, I, 270.

⁷⁹Ibid., I, 271.

⁸⁰Ibid., I, 269-72.

a corruption of man's true essence but not its destruction."⁸¹
 Therefore, even when involved in sin, the sense of obligation toward his essential nature, or voice of conscience, is still in man, and the claim that essential nature makes upon him is felt as law:

It is the 'good that I would' but which 'I do not.' It is 'the commandment which was ordained to life but which 'I found to be unto death' (Rms. 8) of which St. Paul speaks. It is unto death because the law speaks the requirements without helping man to fulfill them.⁸²

In spite of sin and errors and resultant confusion, the essential nature or voice of conscience "written in the heart" still makes its presence known--as law when man is in sinful action, and as the very structure of his being when he enters into contemplation in his self-transcendence.⁸³

In contemplation man catches a vision (though still imperfect because of his inability to transcend every perspective) of what he should be in comparison to what he is, and this contemplation is "perfection before the Fall," or perfection before the act. But when self enters into action, anxiety mounts, the vision of what should be is lost, and the self sins. Hence, whenever man moves from contemplating what he should be to acting, he does less than he knows he should do and involves himself once more in narrow self-assertion. This movement from contemplating what he should be to acting sinfully is man's fall. And the

⁸¹Niebuhr, I, 269.

⁸²Ibid., I, 272-73.

⁸³Ibid., I, 275.

vertical nature of this movement explains Niebuhr's suggestion that the Fall be understood as a vertical relation.

Because man is involved continually in the process of falling, he feels guilty, suffers from an uneasy conscience, and may resort to even greater self-assertion to overcome his uneasiness as the Pharisees have done in every generation.⁸⁴ In short, without freedom from anxiety, "man is so enmeshed in the vicious circle of egocentricity, so concerned about himself, that he cannot release himself for the adventure of love."⁸⁵ And without relation to God, which alone can give us freedom from anxiety, man and his fellows "sink to the level of things."⁸⁶ The consequences of the mixture of anxiety and lack of trust in God are terrible indeed!

Justification and Sanctification

Though man is not totally depraved, but is left with an uneasy conscience in his sinful self-assertion, he manages, nevertheless, to convince himself of his innocence to the degree that he enables himself to continue asserting himself in pride. Thus prophetic religion is needed to make man fully aware of his sin and lead him to repentance. It was the great Hebrew prophets who first lashed out in the name of God against human pride.

⁸⁴Niebuhr, I, 276-80.

⁸⁵Ibid., I, 272. It should be remembered that the later Niebuhr, while still recognizing the power of anxiety due to finitude, would no longer make this anxiety the sole factor leading to man's falling.

⁸⁶Ibid.

But it is in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ that we most completely feel the judgment of God. It is Christ "as the norm of human nature [that] defines the final perfection of man in history." And this perfection is "the perfection of sacrificial love."⁸⁷ This norm is elaborated in the teaching of Jesus, where we find the demand for absolute, sacrificial love and not just mutual love, in which no allowance is made for prudential morality, for pride or for sensuality.⁸⁸ What Jesus demands is the "impossible possibility."⁸⁹ No man so grounds his life in God's love, so rises above anxiety and resultant self-assertion as to be able to live in perfect love. And a prophetic religion "goes beyond common sense in that it excludes no action, not even the best, from the feeling of guilt."⁹⁰

Is there then anything left for man but despair when he is confronted by his own sinful situation through conscience and prophetic religion (working through conscience)? Niebuhr points out that this is exactly the question with which the Hebrew prophets were unable to deal. With their keen insight and moral conviction, they saw the sin in man and denounced it with fervor. But in so doing they stumbled upon the puzzle of "how history can be anything more than judgment, which is to say, whether the promise of history can be fulfilled at all."⁹¹ If all are

⁸⁷ Niebuhr, II, 68.

⁸⁸ Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, pp. 46-49

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹¹ Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, II, 27.

sinners, the relation of divine mercy to divine wrath remains a mystery.⁹² How can any be saved and find fulfillment in the end time, in communion with God, when "all history is involved in a perennial defiance of the law of God?"⁹³ The prophets were unable to solve this mystery.

And Christianity would not solve the mystery either, if it simply presented Christ as the norm for human conduct. For this would only intensify our sense of despair and convince us of the impossibility of finding a mercy in God above and beyond His wrath. But in Christ we see more than a norm. We also see "a suffering Messiah," the representative of God, "through whom the very love of God was made known in history."⁹⁴ And the love we see in Christ is suffering love, which enables us to realize that vicarious suffering is "the final revelation of meaning in history."⁹⁵ In this vicarious suffering of "the representative of God" the obscurities of history are clarified and the sovereignty of God over history is disclosed. Love, not evil, mercy, not wrath, are ultimately triumphant in this universe, because

it is God Who suffers for man's iniquity. He takes the sins of the world upon and into Himself. This is to say that the contradictions of history are not resolved in history; but they are only ultimately resolved on the level of the eternal and the divine.⁹⁶

⁹²Niebuhr, II, 30-31.

⁹³Ibid., II, 29.

⁹⁴Ibid., II, 44-45.

⁹⁵Ibid., II, 45.

⁹⁶Ibid., II, 46.

God's mercy has made itself known in history through Christ, "so that man in history may become fully conscious of his guilt and his redemption." Hence, we see in Jesus both the norm that proves our guilt and the love that accepts us in spite of our guilt. Thus, history now is an interim. Sin is overcome in principle, but not in fact. But we can live with the conviction that ultimately, at the end of history, God's suffering love will overcome those contradictions we find in history, and His mercy, rather than His wrath, will be poured out upon us. But it is important to remember that the contradictions in history will be overcome only beyond history, not in history. The liberal movement in Christianity believed that suffering love, both divine and human, would abolish evil from history itself. But, Niebuhr writes, "the love which enters history as suffering love, must remain suffering love in history."⁹⁷ Indeed, the very idea of the Antichrist at the end of history points to the New Testament belief "that history remains open to all possibilities of good and evil to the end."⁹⁸ Right up to the close of history there will be evil, because man will continue selfishly to assert himself.

This leads to Niebuhr's discussion of justification by faith. He attacks the Catholic idea that sanctification is possible within history on the ground that man never reaches that state where he ceases to sin, and that to believe he can, only

⁹⁷Ibid., II, 49.

⁹⁸Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 235.

leads to Pharisaism.⁹⁹ The chief significance of the Reformation, Niebuhr believes, is that "it is the historical locus where that side of the gospel, which negates and contradicts historical achievements, became more fully known."¹⁰⁰ The Reformation emphasis on justification by faith "represents the final renunciation in the heart of Christianity of the human effort to complete life and history, whether with or without divine grace."¹⁰¹ It represents the culmination of the prophetic interpretation of history in its conviction that man is always a sinner, that he never reaches complete sanctification, and that any attempt on his part to complete life and history within history falls under the judgment of God. But this Reformation emphasis goes beyond that of the Hebrew prophets, because it knows of the relationship of God's mercy to His wrath. God takes the sins of the world upon and into Himself, with the result that rather than pour His wrath upon us, He shows us mercy and accepts us through His grace despite the fact that we are still sinners. No matter how much we may morally improve and no matter how much justice may increase within society, still sin is with us. We still stand under the judgment of God and can find redemption only through a justifying grace that accepts us with and in spite of our sins. Niebuhr sums up the Christian hope in meaningful terms when he speaks of the Christian community as that group

⁹⁹Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 137.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., II, 148.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

which does not fear the final judgment, not because it is composed of sinless saints but because it is a community of forgiven sinners, who know that judgment as merciful if it is not evaded.¹⁰²

It is important for a correct understanding of Niebuhr to realize that he does believe man can grow morally and that society can be made more just. That grace of God which comes to us as mercy and forgiveness also comes to us as power. And this grace as power "represents an accession of resources, which man does not have of himself, enabling him to become what he truly ought to be."¹⁰³ So then, through grace as power man can aim toward the goal of sanctification. When he is confronted by the love of God, man's prideful self can be shattered, and God's grace as power can lead him to repentance and to a more sanctified life.

Repentance does initiate a new life.¹⁰⁴

There is no limit to either sanctification in individual life, or social perfection in collective life, or to the discovery of truth in cultural life, except of course the one limit, that there will be some corruption, as well as deficiency of virtue and truth on the new level of achievement.¹⁰⁵

The qualifying section of the latter quotation is expressed even more strongly when Niebuhr says that

a righteousness 'by grace' may lead to new forms of Pharisaism if it does not recognize that forgiveness is as necessary at the end as at the beginning of the Christian

¹⁰² Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 238.

¹⁰³ Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 98-99.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., II, 122.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., II, 156.

life.¹⁰⁶

In short, we can rise to higher levels of love and justice, but at each new level, an element of sinful self-assertion will enter into the situation. We never do reach the point where we arrive at purity of heart. And it is when we forget our need for mercy and repentance, when we begin to think we are pure, that we fall hardest, and furthest, and fastest. Thus the more sanctified we become, the greater is the possibility that when we do sin (and we surely will, and often!), we will sin greatly.

¹⁰⁶ Niebuhr, II, 105.

CHAPTER III

A PROBLEM IN OUR TIMES

The Concept of Sin in a Secular World

If the Christian minister agrees with Niebuhr and Barth about the reality and seriousness of sin, how does he relate this concept to pastoral counseling? This is a particularly difficult problem today, because the concept of sin has become unpopular and is often considered to be irrelevant in our culture. Sin tends to be associated with "old time" religion and hence is stereotyped as something belonging, along with shouting and instantaneous conversion, to the tent meeting in the backwoods, rather than to the more refined churches of the city and suburb. And it is interesting to note that under the influence of liberalism, Protestantism itself grew uneasy about the concept for many decades, feeling much more comfortable with the ideas of moral goodness and progress, both in individual and in social life. Thus, even the Church has given support to the idea that "sin" is an outmoded term. As a result, large numbers of laymen and many of the clergy have done little thinking about the concepts of sin and guilt, finding support for their unwillingness to think about these matters within as well as outside the Church.

Furthermore, the Church has brought large numbers of people into its membership without adequate preparation and has

done little to help them feel the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. But even with effective membership preparation and church programs, it is still most difficult to lead people into confrontation with God and deep understanding of the Christian faith, because they have been so secularized by our culture. Their interests scatter in a thousand directions and the Church usually stands as just one interest among many. Large numbers of persons seem neither willing nor able to cultivate prayer life and understanding of their faith. And under these circumstances, the concepts of sin and real guilt remain vague and often irrelevant. We hear a great deal of talk about this being a post-Christian era, and in light of the powerful challenge secularism has presented to the Church today, the term takes on a disturbing relevancy.

One of the major reasons the minister is reluctant to discuss sin and guilt with his laymen, especially within the counseling situation, lies in his realization that these concepts may indeed seem irrelevant to them. Because this is such a live possibility, he fears that if he brings these matters out into the open in discussion, his laymen will stereotype him as a moral bully, and will tend to repress their feelings in his presence. The danger of such repression due to reference to sin has been pointed out continually by psychologists, and their warnings have made a significant impression on many present day ministers.

Some Contemporary Psychologists and the Christian Understanding of Sin and Guilt

As a matter of fact, psychologists have been pointing out a lot of things to the Church for many decades now, and have been more responsible than any other single factor, I believe, in making the concepts of sin and real guilt appear old-fashioned, irrelevant, and even dangerous. As a consequence, while most people, if not all, certainly experience guilt feelings, some uneasiness about their behavior and attitudes, they are much more inclined to speak about this guilt within the context of psychological terminology (thus taking the edge off responsibility), than within the context of the Christian perspective.

Because of the tremendous influence of psychology on laymen and ministers alike, it is important for us to give special attention to what some of the more influential psychologists are saying about real and false guilt, and to see the implications of their thought for pastoral counseling. But before proceeding to this discussion, the terms "real guilt" and "false guilt" must be at least partially defined. By real guilt I mean guilt that has an objective reference which justifies its existence, guilt that is a proper reaction to particular motives and actions of a person. By false or neurotic guilt I mean guilt that lacks this objective reference, that is not a proper reaction to particular motives, and actions. These definitions are too concise for an adequate understanding of the concepts they seek to explain, but I hope to fill them out and give them substance as the discussion proceeds

in this chapter and the next.

In turning now to the thinking of some of the more important psychologists, it is appropriate to begin with Carl Rogers and Erich Fromm, because they have had a profound and far-reaching effect on psychological theory and practice, at least in the United States, and neither allows for the possibility of real guilt. Furthermore, being leaders within the field of psychology, they of course have had a strong influence on pastoral counseling. Albert C. Outler argues that the presuppositions of modern psychotherapy, taken as a whole, show a deep indebtedness to the nineteenth century world-view, composed primarily of religious humanism and reductive naturalism.¹ As we look at Rogers and Fromm we can see this world view still exerting some influence today.

In Rogers' doctrine of man one moves on to a form of "sanctification" (my term) without ever having repented! He argues that the innermost core of man's nature, of his personality, "is basically socialized, forward-moving, rational and realistic," and he attacks Protestant Christianity for permeating our culture with the concept that man is basically sinful, and that "only by something approaching a miracle can his sinful nature be negated."² Man can be destructive, but such behavior is not the natural movement of the self, but rather the movement of the self

¹Outler, p. 74.

²Rogers, On Becoming a Person, p. 27.

that has been twisted and hurt by its past.³ This can be best understood by studying the development of a child. As the child grows the structure of the self is formed, the "I" comes into existence. And, as this development takes place,

the values attached to experiences, and the values which are a part of the self structure, in some instances are values experienced directly by the organism, and in some instances are values introjected or taken over from others, but perceived in distorted fashion, as if they had been experienced directly.⁴

The real problems of adjustment arise because we take over values from others, primarily our parents. A child may not be fully aware of what is happening, but in fact he is being forced to accept the values of his parents, and should he refuse, he is made to feel extreme guilt. Thus, even though many of these values run against his own experience of his environment and of himself, he must accept them and force his own conflicting experiences out of consciousness.⁵ As a result, the self matures as a divided self, denying many of its own experiences and values in order to remain faithful to those values introjected by the parents. And,

psychological maladjustment exists when the organism denies to awareness significant sensory and visceral experiences, which consequently are not symbolized and organized into the gestalt of the self-structure. When this situation exists, there is a basic or potential psychological tension.⁶

With the self so divided between its true feelings and its

³Rogers, Ibid.

⁴Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy, p. 498.

⁵Ibid., p. 503.

⁶Ibid., p. 510.

introjected values, rigidity, destructiveness, bitterness, lack of control over self are the result. Feelings forced out of awareness demand expression and satisfaction, and the result of these unconscious demands for the person involved can be most unfortunate.⁷

Good psychological adjustment occurs when the concept of the self is such that "all the sensory and visceral experiences of the organism are . . . assimilated on the symbolic level into a consistent relationship with the concept of the self."⁸ Now, in non-directive therapy, where the counselor totally accepts the counselee, and where no sense of judgment is present, the counselee is able to become aware of and to confront those experiences he has never been able to allow into awareness, because of their inconsistency with his self-structure. In the midst of this therapeutic atmosphere, with its absence of judgments giving rise to guilt, the counselee can revise his self-structure to assimilate and include those experiences he has truly felt all along, but never dared allow himself to perceive.⁹

The result is that the positive, constructive forces of personality now take over. Indeed, rather than become more destructive through the acceptance of all ones feelings, one becomes less destructive. He is now a whole person who loves himself and seeks to live in harmony with his fellow men. Such a

⁷Rogers, pp. 510-512.

⁸Ibid., p. 512

⁹Ibid., p. 517.

person participates in "the vastly complex self-regulating activities of his organism . . . in such a fashion as to live in increasing harmony with himself and with others."¹⁰ Through therapy he is able to achieve inner harmony and to move on to "sanctification," or, as Rogers would put it, essential goodness.

In reading Rogers I find that I must criticize him at several important points. In this criticism I speak from a Niebuhrian perspective, as presented in CHAPTER II, because I feel his understanding of man more adequately grasps the complexities of the human being than any other I have yet read. I will more fully elaborate on this fact later, but I want to make clear here my perspective in this criticism.

Rogers has correctly seen some of the problems leading to maladjusted behavior and ways in which to relieve such behavior. But to excuse man of all responsibility for his destructiveness, to relieve him of all guilt feeling because his destructiveness is a result of unfortunate childhood development, is to deny his radical freedom and to undercut his dignity as a human being. Rogers would answer that in fact his aim is to increase man's freedom, and this is true. But Rogers does not really believe that man's radical freedom also exists before therapy. Man may be driven in some areas of his behavior, but surely, under most circumstances, he must have some awareness, some freedom, and hence some responsibility for his egocentric behavior.

¹⁰Rogers, On Becoming a Person, p. 195.

But not only has Rogers taken an extreme position in essentially denying the freedom and responsibility of man for his egocentricity, but also in claiming that after therapy one lives in harmony with self and neighbor, and hence has no need to feel guilt. And, incidently, he offers little supporting evidence for this sweeping claim.¹¹ I believe one of the basic faults at this point in Rogers' theory lies in his perception of man's anti-social behavior. He sees such behavior in the obvious, grotesque acts of man, but seems reluctant to perceive the finer nuances of such behavior in man's less evident manifestations of self-centeredness. In other words, he fails to grasp that one can be sociable, co-operative, even diffident, and still be destructively self-centered.

Here then, within the field of psychology, we see an understanding of man in deep opposition to the views of such theologians as Niebuhr and Barth, and an understanding which, I feel, fails to grasp the full complexity of man. Yet, this view has had a large impact on present-day theories of counseling. The minister can learn a great deal from Rogers concerning unjustified or false guilt, the causes of much psychological maladjustment, and the importance of a therapeutic atmosphere of genuine acceptance. But Rogers also presents grave problems for the minister who holds to a belief in man's radical freedom and

¹¹Bernard M. Loomer points out that Rogers has furnished little data to support this claim, in "Reinhold Niebuhr and Carl Rogers," Pastoral Psychology, IX (June, 1958), 19.

responsibility, and consequent sin and real guilt. How much of Rogers "to take" under these circumstances becomes a most difficult question.

Turning to Erich Fromm's thought as seen in Man For Himself, we again find a view being put forward that is quite alien to a Christian doctrine of sin. Fromm too argues that man is essentially good, or, to put it more accurately, that he is not necessarily evil.¹² Man's primary potentiality is to be productive, creative, in a constant state of becoming what he is capable of being.¹³ And if one is productive, then he loves himself and is able to love others.¹⁴ Thus "sanctification" is possible in this life and Fromm can live in the hope that man will someday build a social order governed by the principles of equality, justice, and love.¹⁵

Destructiveness, says Fromm, "is the outcome of unlived life."¹⁶ When life is not productive, then the individual feels bitter, frustrated, lost. Because he hates himself in his situation, he hates others as well and treats them with the same destructiveness with which he treats himself. What causes this non-productive life? The answer lies in one's character, which is the basis for his adjustment to society, since it is "the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy is canalized

¹²Fromm, p. 218.

¹³Ibid., pp. 82-107.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 207-208.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 216.

in the process of assimilation and socialization."¹⁷ Depending on the formation of one's character, he will be either essentially productive or non-productive. (Of course, there are many persons standing between these two ways of living, but Fromm puts the emphasis on persons at the extremes.) And character is formed by temperament, physical constitution, and the impact of life experiences. Fromm leaves little room for radical freedom in man, because character is so completely shaped by these factors, though through therapy some degree of freedom is attainable. As he puts it: "Character is essentially formed by a person's experiences, especially of those in early life, and changeable, to some extent, by insights and new kinds of experiences."¹⁹ The productive person clearly has some freedom, but the non-productive seems to have none; he is essentially a slave to his irrational passions. Fromm seems to want to affirm freedom in all men, but, at least in terms of the non-productive person, he is unable to do so.²⁰ What is needed to help such a person gain freedom and productiveness (which equals virtuousness to Fromm) is awareness, insight into the life-furthering forces within him, that they might be released and put destructive impulses aside. Man has an inherent wish to make productive use of his powers, and therapy must help him remove the obstacles in himself and his

¹⁷Fromm, pp. 59-60.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 52.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 233-34.

environment that block him from following his inclination.²¹

Fromm quite obviously opposes the Christian concepts of sin and guilt, and indeed attacks Christianity as being an "authoritarian ethic" imposed on man from without rather than growing from within, and leading to suppression rather than real dealings with one's destructive impulses.²² We are called upon by Fromm to see man's egotism, his destructiveness, as a sickness, a secondary potentiality, "the absence of the good, the result of the failure to realize life."²³ And,

a judgment that a person is destructive, greedy, jealous, envious is not different from a physician's statement about a dysfunction of the heart or the lungs.²⁴

Fromm has some important things to say, especially concerning both the need for productivity in life and the dangers involved in its frustration, and the repressive tendencies of an external, purely authoritarian approach to ethics which is unconcerned about growth from within. But, speaking again from a Niebuhrian perspective, I believe that his understanding of man is inadequate at some important points.

He does not give sufficient recognition to the radical freedom of man, which makes any attempt to relieve him of responsibility and justified guilt an inadequate view. With Rogers, he sees it as one of his primary tasks to help increase man's freedom through therapy, but I feel he fails to take

²¹Fromm, pp. 228-30.

²²Ibid., p. 226.

²³Ibid., p. 218.

²⁴Ibid., p. 236.

seriously enough that freedom which most men possess even before therapy and which they sometimes use in sinful ways. Certainly, man is shaped by environment and physical constitution, but he cannot be reduced to these factors.

Fromm is unequivocally opposed to any form of narrow self-centeredness, which he sees as a manifestation of self-hate and unfulfillment rather than self-love. True self love and love of neighbor are tied together, because they are the result of productivity, of fulfillment, and neither is expressed without implying the other.²⁵ Fromm has contributed significantly to the understanding of man in his analysis of destructive self-centeredness and genuine self-love. And he certainly is correct in his criticism of that extreme in Christianity which seeks to block all creativity in man. But in criticizing that extreme, he tends to go to the opposite extreme, to see the productive person as an almost morally perfect being, free from the taint of selfishness.

Provided we are right in assuming that destructiveness is a secondary potentiality in man which becomes manifest only if he fails to realize his primary potentialities, we have answered only one of the objections to humanistic ethics. We have shown that man is not necessarily evil but becomes evil only if the proper conditions for his growth and development are lacking. The evil has no independent existence of its own, it is the absence of the good, the result of the failure to realize life.²⁶

His view is in strong opposition to the Christian understanding that no one escapes the taint of egocentricity. The

²⁵Fromm, pp. 129-30.

²⁶Ibid., p. 218.

reason for this opposition is in part due to the fact that much of what Christianity calls destructive egocentricity would be simply the manifestation of productivity to Fromm. The fact that he bitterly criticizes belief in God because it makes man dependent on something transcending himself points up this opposition.²⁷ A considerable degree of self-sufficiency and a resulting contentment with self are undeniable virtues in Fromm's thinking.

However, I do not believe the most significant issue lies here, because he ultimately opposes any form of prideful behavior that subordinates love of others to power over others. Rather, the decisive issue is to be found in Fromm's view that such egocentricity is only a symptom of neurotic self-hate and never a manifestation of genuine self-love (Rogers would agree with Fromm at this point). I believe this is an inadequate understanding of the relation of egocentricity to one's attitude toward himself. Certainly in some persons self-centered behavior is a manifestation of emotional sickness, but I do not believe Fromm can really justify his view that all such behavior is symptomatic of sickness, or self-hate.²⁸ Surely it can be and often is the manifestation of real self-love, that is, love of self arising from the fact that one is productive and creative, in a state of be-

²⁷Fromm, p. 150.

²⁸Incidentally, many persons who are burdened with neurotic self-rejection still possess some degree of freedom and hence retain an element of responsibility, small though it may be, for their excessive self-concern in the form of self-hate. Only those who are completely driven, who have totally lost their freedom, can be exonerated from a degree of responsibility for their egocentricity.

coming. Such self-love is continually succumbing to the temptation of thinking too highly of itself, and, therefore, does take advantage of others at times, and does so as an act of freedom rather than as an act of necessity. This has traditionally been the conviction of the Christian Church, and I believe the facts of history and personal insight bear out the accuracy of this conviction. Egocentricity may not take the obvious forms of boasting or blatant self-assertion, but rather, for example, the form of a manipulating diffidence, but its lack of obviousness does not deny its reality and universality. And, as Niebuhr points out, it is this universality of egocentricity (even in the person who possesses a healthy self-acceptance) that keeps the doctrine of original sin alive and gives it substance.²⁹

Here too, then, we see a view opposed to a Christian understanding of man, and a view that has made an impact on the theory of pastoral counseling. Along with Rogers, Fromm offers important insights to the minister, but also presents some grave problems in terms of relating his thought to the Christian concepts of sin and guilt.

While Fromm and Rogers go to an extreme in reducing all guilt to the neurotic consequences of personality disturbances, thus seeing it as lacking objective reference to justify its existence, another psychologist, O. Hobart Mowrer, has gone to the other extreme in his tendency to see all guilt as real and justified. In his book, The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion, he argues that anxiety does not arise from acts one would commit

²⁹Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 18. Also see Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, I, Chapter IX.

but dares not (Freud's view) but rather from acts he has committed but wishes he had not committed. Mowrer thus puts forward a guilt theory rather than an impulse theory of anxiety.³⁰ He states that one loses his freedom only when he violates the trust of conscience, in which case conscience "takes over," depriving the individual of freedom and restoring it only when he can again be trusted. Thus therapy's goal is not to make the unconscious (which he equates with conscience) conscious. It is already too much in evidence. The objective is to get it to subside and relax, and this happens only when the ego redeems itself.³¹ Neurosis and psychosis are essentially moral disorders. Real guilt, caused by sinful behavior, leads to these states. In neurosis and functional psychosis,

the individual has committed tangible misdeeds, which have remained unacknowledged and unredeemed and his anxieties thus have a realistic social basis and justification.³²

When a person commits sinful acts, his conscience causes a rise in his anxiety, and if he tries to deny his guilt this anxiety will overwhelm him, throwing him into neurotic or even psychotic behavior.³³

Thus Mowrer considers those schools of psychology that want to play down the ideas of sin and responsible guilt as totally inadequate. Our mental hospitals are full of people who have had insight therapy and are still sick.³⁴ He flails out at

³⁰ Mowrer, p. 26.

³¹ Ibid., p. 31.

³² Ibid., p. 84.

³³ Ibid., p. 151.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

Rogers for totally misunderstanding the human situation.³⁵ And, furthermore, he bitterly criticizes the seminaries for teaching, and the ministers for practicing, such theories as those advocated by Rogers and other Freudians. (Mowrer places all those who deny that man is sinful and has real guilt in the Freudian camp.) He feels the Church has "sold out" to this kind of thinking which cannot be reconciled with the Christian faith.³⁶

What man needs to do, to relieve his guilt feelings, is to confess to significant others and to make restitution for wrongs committed, perhaps not "in kind," but in some form that allows him to atone for his sins.³⁷ (The reason electro-convulsive shock treatment sometimes helps recovery of depressed persons is that it aids in the work of such expiation.)³⁸ This line of thinking leads Mowrer to oppose the concept of justification by faith, and to approve that form of Christianity demanding good works for salvation.³⁹ He rejects the concept of the Atonement and argues that we should simply look upon Jesus as the teacher whose ethic is to be followed.⁴⁰

How exactly should the minister conduct pastoral counseling? Mowrer says frankly that in an over-all sense he does not know. The situation calls for courage, social inventiveness, and fresh insights, and it needs them now. However, he does suggest

³⁵Mowrer, pp. 54, 164-65.

³⁷Ibid., p. 199.

³⁹Ibid., p. 158.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 60-80.

³⁸Ibid., p. 100.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 182.

that we return to the practice of confession. Pastoral counseling as it now stands does everything but lead to confession, he charges. Further, we need a "sober program of expiation" to help the counselee atone for his sins.⁴¹

Needless to say, Mowrer has touched on some explosive issues, and has trampled on the toes of both psychology and religion. He has taken an extreme position, one that few would care to follow all the way. In his eagerness to defend the concept of real guilt, he has, in fact, rejected the reality of false guilt and has adopted a position with strong overtones of moralism. And this moralism becomes almost unrestricted in his rejection of any concept of grace. Thus I fear that his approach in many cases would be inadequate in its diagnosis and destructive in its therapeutic efforts.

Yet Mowrer has helped to reopen the discussion within psychology concerning sin and guilt and the result may be an increase in creative thinking concerning these factors. It is a difficult problem to know just how much of Mowrer's theory is applicable to pastoral counseling and in what way. Certainly, Protestantism could develop, for example, some definite form of confession and system of expiation, but it would have to do so without adopting Mowrer's "justification by works" outlook or Catholicism's sacramental implications. Anyway, the important point for this study is that within the field of psychology there

⁴¹Mowrer, pp. 77-78.

is a growing awareness that sin and guilt are not outdated concepts and that they must be faced and dealt with, for the sake of mental health.

Between the extremes of Fromm and Rogers on the one side and Mowrer on the other stands Paul Tournier. In his book, Guilt and Grace, he presents a position concerning sin and guilt that has been deeply influenced by the Christian faith. Tournier is a psychiatrist who feels very strongly that men do sin and do experience real guilt. But, he warns, most persons are also burdened with much false guilt, guilt most commonly instilled in them in their early years and due in large part to feelings of failure and resultant inferiority. Parents for example, often have high expectations for their child, and when the child falls short of such expectations, they are likely to feel threatened as to their adequacy as parents, and to communicate to the child the feeling that he has let them down. This type of experience, if continually reinforced, creates in the child a sense of failure and inferiority and, consequently, guilt for not having done as the parents wanted, even if he was not in fact able to meet their expectations in the first place.⁴² Now this false guilt gets mixed with real guilt in the counselee, so that it is impossible for the counselor (and often the counselee) to discriminate between them. Ultimately, only God knows which is which. Thus, Tournier sees his task as that of leading his counselee to confrontation with God and His grace rather than trying to play God

⁴²Tournier, pp. 9-12.

himself.⁴³ This confrontation is especially important because neurosis is basically a failure to exonerate oneself from guilt.⁴⁴

Tournier has a lot of harsh things to say about the legalistic moralizing tendency of many ministers, who presume that they can judge their fellow men on the basis of their external acts. Such behavior by ministers only increases the burden of false guilt and forces the counselee, out of self-defense, into a refusal to face the real guilt that he surely possesses. Too often the minister crushes rather than frees.⁴⁵ We must remember that God is concerned about sin, not sins, and when we start defining sinfulness in terms of particular acts without being aware of the motivations behind such acts, we have forsaken true Christianity. The Church and psychology should be in agreement that the important thing is motive, the inner orientation of a man.⁴⁶

How does Tournier suggest that we lead the counselee to confrontation with God that he might be aware of his true guilt? Unfortunately he says little in this respect. He does say that if the counselor speaks freely of his own faults, this often leads the other to do likewise (though this does not necessarily lead to confrontation with God).⁴⁷ And he feels strongly that "to offer grace only is to cut off half the Gospel."⁴⁸ Those who

⁴³Tournier, pp. 67-73.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 136.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 54.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 168.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 112, 152.

are aware of guilt need grace; those unaware of guilt need to be awakened to it that they might then be open to the healing power of grace. But beyond these remarks he does not go.

Essentially then Tournier has not given a theory on how to lead men to the realization of guilt, but rather has argued for the need of facing real guilt within the context of grace, and has pointed out the danger involved in a moralistic approach to counseling. Further, he has presented a persuasive case for the view that psychology and Christianity are not necessarily in opposition.⁴⁹

Thus we find that within the field of psychology there is no monolithic, clear-cut view on the matter of sin and guilt. Rather, we see widely conflicting views struggling against one another. Some of these views are opposed to stands such as Barth and Niebuhr would take on the concepts of sin and real guilt, while others show real sympathy for such stands. But the fact remains that to unite the insights of psychology and the claims of Christianity is a most difficult task. As I have tried to show above, even those in psychology who stand with or close to the Christian understanding of sin and guilt offer little help in combining psychology and religion for pastoral counseling.

Efforts to Create an Alliance

This discussion would be quite incomplete without reference to two men who have sought explicitly to demonstrate that

⁴⁹Tournier, pp. 123-27.

Christianity and psychology can be allies, indeed must be, in this critical age of sickness and despair. These men are David Roberts and Albert Outler.

David Roberts' book, Psychotherapy and a Christian View of Man, is rich in content, fully grasping the Christian view of sin and guilt and the psychological view of mental health. But in his chapters directly relevant to pastoral counseling, in which he deals with static and dynamic understandings of salvation I believe Roberts subordinates a theological to a psychological understanding of man. The result of this is that pastoral counseling as he apparently conceives of it has no room for significant confrontation with real guilt. Rather, it seems to consist solely of a therapeutic situation in which a person can experience a creative growth through the releasing of a power "which removes the causes of guilt."⁵⁰ He criticizes those theologies which emphasize man's sinfulness to the point that salvation is exclusively God's accomplishment. Such static views see man's salvation

not in terms of discoveries and dynamic changes within him, but in terms of an alteration of his status before God--a shift from condemnation to justification in the light of what Christ has done.⁵¹

In contrast, Roberts argues that

salvation should be thought of primarily in terms of a dynamic transformation that removes man-made evils at the source by changing the man. . . . The preceding discussion has led up to a conception of salvation as that condition of wholeness which comes about when human life is based in openness (i.e., with 'self-knowledge') upon the creative

⁵⁰ Roberts, p. 129.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 125.

and redemptive power of God.⁵²

Roberts argues that Christ should not be used tyrannically as the basis for condemning other men incapable of reproducing His unique endowments. Rather, "He points to the redeemability of our human nature, and to the possibility of reaching self-acceptance in fellowship with God."⁵³ Christ is savior as He helps the individual move toward harmony with divine love.

This involves moving forward into a deeper recognition of failure, impotence and need at many points. But the divine forgiveness which He discloses always has been and always will be accessible to men.⁵⁴

Roberts has made a sincere effort to bring the insights of psychology and religion into a creative synthesis.⁵⁵ He is a forerunner in this effort and there is much thought-provoking material in his book. But I feel that he has not been entirely successful, at least from a viewpoint such as Barth's or Niebuhr's. While he shows a clear understanding of Christian thought in regard to sin, he does not, in the last analysis, identify his own thinking with that understanding. He does not really come to grips with the reality and persistent power of sin and the importance of repentance. The psychological concepts of growing harmony and love, found in Fromm and Rogers, are so emphasized that he tends to empty the concept of sin of any real meaning. Of course, Christianity does speak of inner transformation and growth in sanctification, and the narrow limits

⁵² Roberts, p. 125.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 135.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 134.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. xiii, 153.

Niebuhr and Barth put on sanctification are not necessarily the final word on the matter. Yet, I would argue that if we are to take Christianity seriously we must maintain that we continue until death to be sinners in need of God's justifying love. Roberts would undoubtedly agree, but when his book gets down to specifics, this agreement becomes questionable.

Albert Outler, in his book, Psychotherapy and the Christian Message, has been more successful in showing the possibility of a true alliance between Christianity and psychology without running roughshod over either. He writes from the Christian perspective and is extremely cautious in his dealings with psychology. However, a careful reading of the book shows that he is by no means against psychology as a "practical wisdom" dedicated to forwarding mental health.⁵⁶ The Church can learn much from its phenomenological descriptions of the self and from the methods it has developed for effective counseling.⁵⁷ Psychology has done much "to understand and reorder men in their disorders."⁵⁸ But Outler strongly opposes psychology when it goes beyond its practical wisdom to affirm a world view and to claim scientific backing for that world view. And this world view inevitably contains a strong dose of humanism and naturalism.⁵⁹ If psychology is to be a science, then let it be a science, says Outler, but let it not put forth a faith, a world perspective, in the name of

⁵⁶Outler, p. 45.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 144.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 22-38, 95.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 45.

that science!

It is Outler's belief that an alliance between psychology as a science and Christianity as a world view offers immensely creative possibilities. This alliance

would represent the authentic wisdoms which each affords and sidetrack the borrowed wisdoms which each requires for its completion. Psychotherapy's practical wisdom is its very own, empirically founded. The naturalistic world view it generally exhibits is borrowed. Christianity's practical wisdom is largely borrowed; its theistic world view is its very own, the bone and marrow of its Gospel. A psychotherapy which freely admitted the Christian doctrines of God and men as the referential 'frame' of its empirical work could be well concerted with a Christian care of souls which fully acknowledge the direction and counsel of scientific psychotherapy.⁶⁰

Such an alliance would give Christianity badly needed assistance in the cure of souls, and would enable psychology to function as a science while yet not reducing man to a mere organism, or product of his environment. This alliance could affirm man's responsibility, grasp the reality of sin, and recognize the need for and the power of God's grace.⁶¹

Outler's book is stimulating and perceptive in pointing to the need for an alliance between psychology and Christianity, and in drawing out the implications of such an alliance. But, unfortunately, it offers little help for the minister attempting to relate the concepts of sin and guilt to pastoral counseling. Outler makes clear that an alliance would require that psychotherapy recognize man as a responsible creature who is involved in sinfulness. But he does not deal with the problem of

⁶⁰ Outler, p. 245.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 257.

relating Christian convictions and psychological insights within pastoral counseling.

And so we see that even Roberts and Outler, who have made conscious efforts to combine the teachings of psychology and the claims of Christian faith, have not been of too much help to the minister in his efforts, in counseling, to hold to the concepts of sin and guilt while yet being open to the insights offered by psychology.

The Influence of Psychology on Educational Preparations for Pastoral Counseling

When we turn to the subject of ministerial preparation for pastoral counseling we find the same lack of guidance in this effort. Courses in pastoral counseling, while not denying sin and guilt, usually have little to say about relating these concepts to the counseling situation. I believe Mowrer is correct in his view that such seminary courses are doing more in the way of trying to show the necessity of reducing false guilt feelings than in pointing to the need for confrontation with sinful behavior and real guilt feelings in connection with such behavior. Again, I do not believe sin and real guilt are being denied; but the way to deal with these factors in counseling is not being presented in an adequate way. Now of course there are undoubtedly some seminaries, primarily fundamentalist, that are indeed teaching the need for confrontation with sin, but these, I am sure, are basically uninterested in psychological insights. It is in

the seminaries of the "main line" denominations, where both psychology and Christianity are dealt with, that an approach to pastoral counseling allowing for the combination of both psychological insights and the Christian concepts of sin and guilt is both a possibility and an urgent need.

This need becomes even more apparent and acute in light of a present-day approach in pastoral counseling emphasizing that to bring religion into the counseling situation can be repressive and ruin the opportunity of the minister to be of real help. When I took a twelve week course in clinical pastoral training several years ago, this idea was stressed over and over again. If any of us students got uneasy about this approach, we were inevitably asked what our need was that we had to have props and were afraid simply to give ourselves and allow God's love to work through our relationship. Now it is true that religion often has been used in a repressive way in counseling, and that it is in constant danger of becoming repressive with many of the secularly oriented people with whom we must deal today. We need to be aware of these facts; but yet, at the same time there seems to be something rather peculiar and unfortunate about a minister being afraid to make explicit reference to religion within the counseling situation. Certainly God can and does work through relationships and the power of His love does not depend on verbal reference to Him. Yet, if the minister is truly committed to the Christian faith, and finds in it a saving message, then it is only natural and proper that he should desire verbally to communicate aspects

of this message especially relevant to particular problems of his counselees. Pastoral counseling courses in the seminary and in clinical training have not fully faced the minister's predicament concerning this matter, and as a result he is likely to be somewhat confused about how he should relate the Christian message to the counseling situation.

A Summation of the Minister's Dilemma

It might be helpful at this point to pull together the various strands of thought so far expressed in this chapter, concerning the dilemma of the minister holding to an essentially Christian understanding of the nature of man. This minister is convinced of man's sinfulness and real guilt, and that such guilt, if repressed and denied, rather than confessed in the presence of God's love, can cause grave emotional problems within a person, intensify his sinfulness, and isolate him from others and from God. But he has also heard deep warnings from psychologists about the dangers involved in increasing one's guilt load; indeed he has even heard some of them flatly deny the reality of sin and real guilt. And those psychologists who do affirm their reality offer him little help in bringing these factors to bear in counseling.

Coupled with these problems is the secularism of so many of our people, even within the Church, to whom such concepts as sin and guilt have lost any vital meaning, and to whom the reality of God's presence has become such a highly questionable factor that true confrontation is more a theory than a fact.

In the midst of such complex problems, it is a real temptation for the minister to speak of sin from the pulpit on Sunday and to avoid the concept the rest of the week, expressing man's sinfulness in other categories of thought, especially those furnished by psychologists. But when he tries this approach he is likely to be haunted by the feeling that he is not truly fulfilling his ministerial duties. He feels the anxious need to relate the concepts of sin, guilt, repentance, and redemption to all aspects of his ministry, including especially pastoral counseling. But he does not know how. Perhaps I have exaggerated the case, but I seriously doubt this. On the contrary, I believe I have been fairly accurate in describing the dilemma of many a minister today.

However, I must emphasize that I am speaking about many and not all ministers. Certainly there are large numbers of ministers who pay no attention whatsoever to what modern psychologists are saying, and undoubtedly a large proportion of them freely and indiscriminately refer to religion in the counseling situation, and do so in a harshly moralistic manner, totally oblivious to the implications of this approach. And too, there are some who have become so absorbed in psychology that they have, in fact, turned away from a Christian understanding of man.

It is the ministers who find themselves between these two extremes with whom I am most concerned in this chapter. It is they who grasp the significance both of the Christian message and of modern psychology, and who, as a result, find themselves in a

most uncomfortable position in regard to pastoral counseling.

The Underlying Problem

I believe it is fair to say that the key issue underlying most of the problems discussed in this chapter is the question of real guilt. The fact that Christianity generally affirms its reality while many leading psychologists deny it has done much to create the confusing situation I have been analyzing.

If the minister is to remain faithful to Christianity, he must maintain that sin and real guilt do in fact exist, and I believe he can best do this within the context of Niebuhr's understanding of sin and conscience, as presented in the preceding chapter. Most persons possess an element of self-transcendent freedom, and when one uses this freedom in an egocentric manner, taking advantage of his neighbor for his own personal welfare, he is involved in sinfulness. And because he has a conscience that judges him when he oversteps the boundary of mutual dependence and respect, he feels some degree of guilt for his sinfulness, small though it may be. And this guilt arising from egocentricity is real, with an objective reference fully justifying its presence within the person. Indeed, in most cases its presence needs to be felt more strongly so that the person might be led to a significant repentance.

However, the situation is complicated by the fact that persons are also burdened with false guilt, guilt not arising from sin and therefore not justified on the basis of objective

reality. It is the mixture of this false guilt with real guilt that is of such concern to Dr. Tournier, and I believe his concern is entirely reasonable. There is a degree of false guilt in most of us, arising in many and various ways. It can, for example, be derived from the sense of failure a person experiences when he is unable to meet his parents' expectations for him, or it can be derived from a strictly moralistic background that sees sin in all forms of creativity and pleasure. These are two of the principle ways such guilt arises, but in fact there seems to be an almost infinite number of ways in which it can gain entrance into a person's life.

The minister is under Christian obligation to help the counselee reduce his false guilt feelings when they are present and destructive. But how is he to delineate between these and real guilt feelings so that he can deal effectively with each without overlooking the other? This is, of course, the crucial question, and there is no simple answer to it. However, it is imperative that it be faced and an answer be sought. In the next chapter, in which I discuss the implications of Barth's and Niebuhr's thought for pastoral counseling, I will attempt to deal with this question, as it will be particularly relevant in that discussion.

Some Psychological Insights Important for Pastoral Counseling

Before moving on to that discussion, I would like to suggest seven insights derived from psychology that offer the

minister valuable guidance in his handling of the problem of guilt in counseling. While psychologists are giving the minister little assistance in his dealings with the problem of real guilt in counseling, they have, nevertheless, offered some important insights into counseling in which guilt is a factor. These insights are primarily concerned with the dangers involved in using the concepts of sin and real guilt, but that fact does not detract from their value. The seven I am listing here are ones the minister can fully accept without sacrificing his Christian stance in regard to these concepts.

1. Not all guilt is real or justified. There are varying degrees of false guilt feelings in us and the increase of these false guilt feelings is dangerous for mental health.

2. Not all self-assertion is sinful. Man's very uniqueness centers on the fact that he is a self-conscious individual with creative abilities above the instinctual level. And creativity in any sphere requires assertion of the self in the development of one's talents. Thus, the minister must be careful not to assume the sinfulness of all self-assertion and hence fail to understand the need in man to develop and express creative abilities.

3. Not all problems stem from sinful behavior. Some areas of personality maladjustment may be derived, for example, from an unhealthy childhood, and while containing elements of sinfulness, are not primarily the result of, or the manifestation of sinfulness.

4. To the degree that a person has no awareness of particular aspects of his character, responsibility for acts largely shaped by those aspects of character is greatly reduced.

5. The minister needs to enter into genuine "I-Thou" relationship with the counselee, practicing the art of listening, helping the other express inner feelings.

6. If the minister accuses one of sinning, attempting to force him into admitting sin and then repenting, he may block real relationship with the other, cause repression, arouse false as well as real guilt feelings, and force the other into self-defensive behavior.

7. In close connection with number 6, moralism, simply dealing with external acts rather than the motives behind such acts, misses the real person and can cause repression and an increase in false guilt.

There are more points that could be listed here, but I think these seven are some of the more essential ones that the minister should learn from present day psychological thought. In the next chapter I will discuss the implications of Barth's and Niebuhr's concepts of sin for pastoral counseling, especially in the light of these seven points. Out of that discussion I hope to be able to offer some constructive ideas, few though they may be, concerning how the minister might relate the Christian understanding of sin and guilt to pastoral counseling.

CHAPTER IV

BARTH, NIEBUHR, AND PASTORAL COUNSELING

A Comparison of Barth's and Niebuhr's Doctrines of Sin

Before seeking to apply Barth's and Niebuhr's concepts of sin to pastoral counseling, it is necessary to compare them to each other so that we can get a clearer idea of where each man stands, and try to understand the basic direction in which his thought leads him. This information will help us to grasp more accurately the implications of each concept for pastoral counseling.

It is clear from the discussion of Niebuhr and Barth that both take sin very seriously, that they find it in all men, and that they see it as having terrible consequences. But they nevertheless have quite different doctrines of sin. They agree on some points, but differ on many.

In the first place, Niebuhr does not join Barth in affirming universal salvation. What he does say is that the "Last Judgment" is a symbol, a pointer, of the eternal. This symbol must not be taken literally but should be taken seriously.¹ There will be a final judgment upon history, with its mixture of good and evil, and we can only put our faith in the divine mercy and

¹Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, II, 289.

the forgiveness of sins.² We Christians must take our stand on the conviction that in Christ God has revealed a love that, in the final judgment, will overcome the ambiguities of history; His mercy will prevail.³ But, Niebuhr insists:

It is unwise for Christians to claim any knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell, or to be too certain about any details of the Kingdom of God in which history is consummated. But it is prudent to accept the testimony of the heart, which affirms the fear of judgment.⁴

The "Last Judgment" as described in the Bible is not to be taken literally, but yet, we Christians know due to the ambiguous mixture of good and evil in history, that God must make some sort of final judgment on history. Beyond this Niebuhr does not go.

Barth and the early Niebuhr are in basic agreement in arguing that the primary sin is unbelief, which is ultimately inexplicable. And this concept of sin, as I tried to point out earlier, creates grave problems. Can one really hold all men responsible for sin under this concept, when it is a real question whether belief in God is really a live option for all persons? The early Niebuhr was left with this problem and Barth still is. If Barth does wish to call all people responsible sinners, it is difficult (I would even say impossible) for him to do so under the definition of the primary sin as unbelief. And this problem becomes even more complicated by the fact that Barth argues that God only awakens a few, and does so with no assistance of the

²Niebuhr, II, 292.

³Ibid., II, 291-94.

⁴Ibid., II, 294.

persons involved. And if he should choose to call only the awakened Christians responsible sinners (and he does make a movement in this direction) he is forced then to excuse all non-Christians and "non-awakened Christians" from responsibility for their sins. Because of the serious problems this concept presents, I feel the later Niebuhr's concept of sin as egocentricity is a much more fruitful avenue of approach to the problem of responsibility for sin. Under this concept no one is excused from responsibility, and, furthermore, there is a point of contact between the Christian and non-Christian.

This leads directly to the problem of awareness of sin. Barth argues that we become aware of sin only in encounter with Christ. Outside that encounter we always explain away our sinfulness. Niebuhr, on the other hand, argues that man even apart from encounter with God does have a vague awareness of sin, of narrow self-centeredness. He does not want to push this concept very far, because he too feels that only in confrontation with God do we really come to grips with our sin and guilt. But yet, for all his qualifications, he does want to affirm that man without confrontation with God experiences some awareness of his sin and guilt. And this positive view of the presence of conscience is the natural corollary to his conviction that all men are responsible sinners. Here too I believe Niebuhr offers the more fruitful avenue of approach. Surely we must affirm that all men (other than, perhaps, some who are mentally retarded or involved in extreme psychotic disorders) do have a dim awareness of

their sinful self-centeredness, their disregard for the dignity of their neighbor. The difference between Barth and Niebuhr at this point is too great. Indeed, at times Barth sounds very much like Niebuhr on this matter, but the preponderance of his discussion in Church Dogmatics makes clear that he really does not want to join Niebuhr on this concept.

The early Niebuhr argued that when we choose unbelief as a way of life, anxiety over our finite existence gets the upper hand. Although anxiety would exist in life even if we lived a life of belief, it would then be held under control. But in unbelief, such anxiety drives us to prideful self-assertion. The later Niebuhr essentially sees anxiety over finitude as just one possible force behind man's choice of egocentricity, and I believe his shift is a good one. To see all self-centeredness as a result of such anxiety is simply to offer too "neat" an explanation for a human being's egocentric behavior. Barth, on the other hand, never has seen anxiety over finitude as a potent force pushing man to sin. In fact, he sees such anxiety not as an ontological factor in man's finitude but as a result of man's unbelief. It is only when we turn from God toward nothingness, when we choose to live on our own, that we experience anxiety (or "human care" as he prefers to call it) concerning our limited existence. Now of course we all experience elements of unbelief and hence experience such human care, but this care is not a necessary ingredient in the human situation.

The later Niebuhr does not elaborate on the different

forces or needs that might lead a man to self-centered behavior, but he does say that ultimately the choice of self-centeredness remains a mystery, because of man's radical freedom. Although Barth's understanding of sin differs from that of Niebuhr, he is in agreement with him in arguing that we cannot explain why man chooses to act in a sinful manner. He admits that there are some secondary causes for sin (or unbelief, in his doctrine), such as laziness, self-satisfaction, or reluctance to be confronted with the truth about oneself, but none of these can ultimately explain why man chooses to live in unbelief, which then expresses itself in pride, sloth (under which he also classifies care), and falsehood. This unbelief is man's incredible, inexplicable choice (though Barth's understanding of man's awakening as being solely the deliberate choice of God causes some problems here, as I have pointed out earlier).

Niebuhr places all sin within the category of narrow self-interest, or egocentricity. He does not reject all self-assertion as sinful, but only that which is a manifestation of each man's inclination to claim more for himself than he deserves, whether this claim be made in terms of knowledge, or righteousness, or authority, or anything else he might use to establish himself at "the center of the universe," to prove his own superior worth in comparison to that of his fellow men. The word "egocentricity" best sums up this human stance Niebuhr labels as sinful. However, he occasionally employs such words as pride, self-love, self-assertion, and egotism, in referring to sinfulness. These words

could be misleading if they cause us to understand Niebuhr's view of sin as covering all self-concern, all self-assertion. Consequently, for purposes of accuracy, it should be remembered that when he uses these words, he is not rejecting all forms of self-assertion, but only those reflecting egocentricity.

While Niebuhr classifies all sinfulness under the heading of egocentricity, Barth seeks to distinguish three forms in which unbelief manifests itself: "pride, sloth (including human care), and falsehood." I do not think that he really manages to carry through such distinctions. As Barth describes these forms, they all seem to be, in fact, forms of egocentricity. But to avoid confusion, it must be remembered that whereas Niebuhr sees egocentricity in itself as the primary sin, Barth sees it (or the three forms I have classified under it) as only the manifestation of the primary sin of unbelief.

The meaning of egocentricity, within the context of Barth's theology, is quite similar to Niebuhr's understanding of it. However, there is some difference, in that Barth ties pride, sloth, and falsehood so closely to unbelief, seeing them as responses to this primary sin. Furthermore, Barth goes beyond Niebuhr in his tendency to put all human activity within what I have called the category of egocentricity. In comparing his view of man's self-assertion to that of Niebuhr, we find that he stresses that the person who is living in unbelief is sinful through and through, that

in the whole sphere of human activities there are not

exceptions to the sin and corruption of man. There is no territory which has been spared and where he does not sin, where he is not perverted, where he still maintains the divine order and is therefore guiltless. At every point man is in the wrong and in arrears in relation to God. Because he himself as the subject of these activities is not a good tree, he cannot bring forth good fruit. . . . He is not just partly but altogether 'flesh.' He does not act in a fleshly way only in certain actions and passions and things done and things not done, but in all of them.⁵

Occasionally he will make what seems to be a positive statement about man's creativity.

We do not forget that man has not forfeited his good nature and its dispositions and capacities by reason of his corruption and under the judgment of God which has come upon him. Even within this conclusion there may be and undoubtedly are the most surprising projects and commendable efforts and astonishing achievements, masterpieces both great and small of human skill and probity, which in this sense inspire us.⁶

But qualifications seem invariably to follow such statements. He adds after the latter of the above quoted sections that even the commendable efforts of man are bracketed together, under divine sentence, with his reprehensible actions and all of them together are classified as disobedience, pride and sin.⁷

Barth does speak of the good works of the Christian, whom God has awakened and engaged in conversion. To the extent that he has turned toward God, his works declare the saving works of God, and can be called good works. But, Barth warns, even this man's good works are full of transgression.⁸

To give a really accurate statement of Barth's view on

⁵Barth, IV:1, 496.

⁶Ibid., IV:1, 506.

⁷Ibid., IV:1, 506-507.

⁸Ibid., IV:2, 591-93.

this matter would require a detailed study of the Church Dogmatics with the sole intention of watching for his comments about man's creativity. This I have not done. But I think the information I have provided here makes clear Barth's tendency to see sinfulness in all of man's actions, because of the fact that man's basic orientation to God is sinful unbelief. Barth does seem to recognize the value of creativity (his love of Mozart's music is an example), and he does recognize an element of value in the good works of the awakened Christian. But, in the last analysis, he appears reluctant to see any creativity as free from the taint of sin. Perhaps I am drawing out implications Barth would resist. But even if he would not wish to take as strong a stand as presented here, yet it seems probable that he would not go so far as would Niebuhr in recognizing the validity, the value, and the goodness of a great deal of man's creative activity.

Extremely important for pastoral counseling is the fact that Barth seems ultimately to reduce all forms and aspects of personality disturbances to the result of sin, which is, perhaps, a logical conclusion to his tendency to see sin in all that man does. An example of this is his understanding of human care or anxiety as solely a result of unbelief. He does not, to the best of my knowledge, explicitly argue that all personality problems are, in fact, the result of sin, but yet, after reading his analysis of sin, it is hard to find any room left for maladjustments derived from any other causes. And, as we shall see below, his close friend, Eduard Thurneysen, builds a theology of pastoral

care on this Barthian tendency to see sin as the underlying cause of all emotional problems. Niebuhr, on the other hand, makes quite clear that, while sinfulness is a destructive force, not all personality problems are the direct consequence of it. The effects of childhood experiences, for example, can play a large role in personality disturbances.

Both Barth and Niebuhr see that justification by faith is the only hope for man, who is so deeply involved in sin. And both affirm that in Christ God has revealed a love and mercy that accepts us despite our sin. However, while in Barth faith plays no role in man's justification (all men have been justified in Christ), Niebuhr views man's turning to God in faith as a necessary ingredient in the process of justification. Of course, even in Barth there is a turning to God in "de facto" justification. But in justification "de jure," in which all men participate, man's attitude is irrelevant to the fact of his justification.

Finally, both Barth and Niebuhr severely limit the concept of sanctification in this life. In confrontation with God we are made vividly, painfully aware of our sin, and in repentance we can struggle to become more fully sanctified in the future. But we do continue to sin, and though there may be evidences in our lives of growth in sanctification due to continual confrontation with God and resultant repentance, yet to the end of our lives we are always sinners in need of justification, standing in the presence of a God who does indeed have mercy upon us. Barth goes

one step further and affirms that despite our sin, all men are sanctified "de jure" here and now in Christ. We do not demonstrate this sanctification in our lives, but in Christ, who was truly sanctified by God, our sanctification has taken place and will be made manifest in the life to come.

To sum up this comparison, we see that there are some points of similarity between Barth and Niebuhr in their concepts of sin, but that they differ at the heart of their concepts. Barth insists on defining sin primarily as unbelief, and seeing this unbelief behind all aspects of personality disturbance. Niebuhr has abandoned this effort to define sin as unbelief and now chooses instead to define it as egocentricity. He, in contrast to Barth, recognizes explicitly that there are other factors in addition to sin that create personality problems.

We must now seek to understand the implications of these differing concepts of sin for the practice of pastoral counseling. In this study it is important to keep in mind the seven psychological guides listed in the last chapter, because they offer important assistance in clarifying these implications.

Barth's Doctrine and Pastoral Counseling

What can we say for Barth's doctrine of sin in terms of pastoral counseling? Eduard Thurneysen, Barth's close friend and theological "ally," has written a book entitled A Theology of Pastoral Care, which offers important insights relevant to this question. Thurneysen believes all mental disorders are derived

from man's choice of alienation from God (or unbelief as Barth would put it) and therefore the minister's goal must be to lead the counselee to repentance. We can use psychological insights and listen intently, but somewhere in the counseling situation, there must be a "breach," a confrontation with God, because,

important as psychology is for accepting and listening, it must under no circumstances have the last word. Exposure to the Word of God must immediately and from the beginning accompany acceptance. The observed facts must immediately be challenged by definite questions directed by the Word of God to everything human. Indeed, even the observation of the facts is undertaken for the sake of the message of the Word of God to be communicated to the person before us in distress. Again and again we must leave behind us everything merely factual and psychological, or rather, we must move it, as best we can, into the light which falls upon it from the Word of God.⁹

This "breach" must take place that sinfulness might be exposed and forgiveness be received, because recovery "is never concerned only with regeneration of man's inner or outer being, but also with deliverance from the corruption of sin by forgiveness in Jesus Christ."¹⁰ Thurneysen goes so far as to state that it is the "breach" that makes pastoral counseling truly pastoral counseling.¹¹

Thurneysen seeks to avoid a moralistic approach by leading his counselee to confrontation with God within the context of a salvation already won in Christ.¹² But what little information he gives concerning how to conduct counseling points to the possibility of moralism and of a repressive atmospheres. Now we

⁹Thurneysen, p. 134.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 248.

¹¹Ibid., p. 138.

¹²Ibid., p. 159.

may at times have to confront persons with their sinfulness, but it is dangerous for the minister always to seek confession of sins in counseling, on the assumption that only in so doing is he fulfilling his role as a pastoral counselor. If he possesses an attitude such as this, it is hard for me to conceive of him being able to avoid pushing the counselee, trying to force him into a confession. Indeed, many of Thurneysen's statements point to just such an unfortunate approach.

The decisive help we have to render him in the confessional conversation will consist in preventing his escape, disgression, hiding, and avoiding the attack of the Word of God. But we must beware of an imperious, domineering, legalistic, and manipulating approach.¹³

How the counselor can perform the former responsibility and avoid the latter danger he does not explain. Again, he says;

It is all important that we do not give in, but rather block this road [life without grace] for him. We cannot help disappointing and offending him.¹⁴

We must be prepared for strenuous conversations. We must not be dismayed or discouraged by closed doors. We must not cease to attend to the sinner and shall not regard a pastoral conversation as ended when it breaks off before it has turned into confessional conversation in some way. Any such conversation ultimately focuses on the return of the prodigal son to the father of which the parable speaks.¹⁵

Again I wish to stress that confrontation may be necessary at times, as I will explain below, but Thurneysen's approach seems to rely on this method too heavily. Confrontation becomes too much of a goal in counseling.

¹³Thurneysen, p. 298.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 293.

I do not wish to misrepresent Thurneysen. His book, long and rambling, contains many strands of thought that are not put together in a particularly systematic way. Yet it is safe to say that his central emphasis does fall on his insistence that the minister must always seek confession in counseling, and I believe such an approach is unjustified and apt to become more important to the counselor than the counselee himself. We can assume that all men are sinners, but it does not necessarily follow that the particular problem a person brings to us demands that we lead that person to confession. Certainly, the love of God is relevant to all problems, but to say that "the content of the proclamation of pastoral care can be no other than the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ" is to make an assertion that I cannot support.¹⁶ The Barthian tendency to see the taint of sin in all a man does and to see all emotional problems as manifestations of his sinfulness leads to an approach to pastoral counseling that cannot be harmonized with the seven points I listed earlier. Perhaps his approach would not be so repressive and "strange" within his Swiss Church as it would be in an American church. But even then, I feel his over-all approach is much too one-sided.

Of course this is Thurneysen, not Barth, making the application of Barthian theology. However, I think Thurneysen has quite accurately made the application. Barth wants to under-

¹⁶Thurneysen, p. 67.

stand man entirely in the light of Christ, and this means that to understand him rightly we must see him as the sinner who has chosen to live in unbelief, with all its terrible consequences for his earthly life. Thus it logically follows that the important thing for the counselor to do is, through the power of God, to lead the counselee to repentance and the life of conversion. Even though the counselee will still find himself deeply involved in sin, he will at least be turned in the right direction. But at this point the Barthian application runs into trouble, because he has argued that God only chooses to make some aware of and responsive to His Word. Therefore, how can those not made aware be led to repentance? Certainly Barth offers Good News to all men, for all may rest assured that they have already been saved. But he makes it most difficult to conceive of pastoral counseling as that situation in which we must always lead the counselee to repentance and awareness of the Good News. Actually, the volume (IV:3) of Church Dogmatics dealing with the problem of God's choosing to make some aware was written after Thurneysen wrote his book. Perhaps had Thurneysen written after this volume, he would have taken a slightly different approach. Of course he could still defend the position presented in his book by arguing that the minister should assume that whoever comes to him for counseling has been awakened by God, but to make such an assumption, within the Barthian context, would be most difficult because Barth is convinced that many who call themselves Christians are not true believers.

Perhaps another way of applying Barth lies in an approach in which the minister would simply not take seriously the counselee's sin and its consequences. He could be well aware of the terrible human predicament this turning toward the chaos can produce. But being convinced that sin is impossible, that it can neither separate the counselee from God's grace nor destroy his being, he would approach the counselee with a spirit of joy and confidence in the counselee's ultimate well-being. As the counselee presents his problems, the minister would seek to communicate to him the fact that his predicament is overcome already, that victory is his even now. If the counselee should grasp this good news, then he might, in a response of gratitude, search out his sinfulness, enter into repentance, and hence, at least to a slight degree, ease the problems he experiences in his daily living. Indeed, it would be the minister's hope that God would use this joyful proclamation as the means by which to awaken or reawaken the counselee. But if the counselee should not grasp this Good News, the minister would not despair, because he would know in his heart that the counselee has been saved and that his sinfulness is ultimately ineffective and, in fact, defeated. And, incidently, this serene confidence of the minister might at least lend support to the counselee even if he should fail to be awakened by God.

Actually, this seems to be the approach Thurneysen seeks to implement. He states again and again that we must lead the counselee to God's grace, and that it is within this context that

judgment is felt. But then, when he begins to get a little more specific, he always ends up emphasizing that the minister must lead the counselee to repentance, and hence the minister's duty to confront the counselee with his sinfulness becomes more immediately important than his proclamation of grace. The alternative I am here suggesting would have the minister seek only to communicate the Good News of what Christ has done for this counselee sitting before him, in the hope that God will use this communication as a means of awakening the counselee, leading him to an awareness of his sinfulness within the context of a salvation already his.

This approach has a strange, unfamiliar ring to it, at least to an American, but yet, if a minister truly believes in the impossibility of sin, some such approach is feasible. However, I find it to be quite inadequate. With a few sensitive Christians this approach might be effective; it might give them courage and strength to face their problems and express them. And the minister's belief that all problems stem from sin and that there is a taint of sin in all we do, might not be repressive due to the fact that he has so completely discounted the power of sin. But for most people I fear such an approach would be repressive. Rather than express their problems, they would tend to go into retreat before the minister's overwhelming optimism. His refusal to take their problems as ultimately serious would be "picked up" as lack of understanding hidden behind platitudinous assurances. This type of approach would be

especially ineffective with the "secular" Christian, to whom the minister's confidence would seem quite irrelevant.

While this approach is not moralistic, it nevertheless runs against several of the seven points I have spoken of earlier. It reduces all problems to sin and consequently fails to get at other problems, and could easily become repressive in its religious assurances. Whether there could be real "I-Thou" dialogue in such counseling seems questionable to me. The minister's concern to communicate the Good News could make it quite difficult for him to let the counselee express himself and be himself.

In concluding this discussion of Barth, I should like to emphasize that aspect of his theology which, in conjunction with his tendency to reduce all personality problems to the result of sin, presents what I consider to be the greatest difficulty for counseling, namely, his concept of the awakened Christian. Barth divides people into two groups, those whom God has awakened and those whom He has not awakened. And only the person who has been awakened can make a successful effort at reducing his sinfulness. Now if the minister accepts this "black and white" division, there is the unfortunate possibility that, when confronted with a religiously "dull" person, he might feel there is nothing he can do for him. And the tendency to understand all emotional disturbances as deriving from sin would only intensify this feeling. Until this person has been awakened, there simply can be no change for the better in him. Of course, as discussed

above, the minister can hope that God will use the counseling situation to awaken this man. But if God does not, the minister is apt to feel that there is little that he as a pastoral counselor can do to help the counselee deal with his immediate problems. And no matter how great his joy about the counselee's ultimate well-being, if he feels a degree of hopelessness about the present "existential" situation, and the counselee should sense this, the consequences could be destructive for the counselee.

The Barthian approach is totally unable to accept the fact that some persons, while not fully awakened, do have a slight awareness of God's reality and presence. The position of Barth is, I believe, unfortunate, because such slight awareness, which appears to be the highest degree of "awakenness" that can be found in many a present-day Christian, can be of importance in pastoral counseling. Even this dim awareness can help a person understand the meaning of sin and the need for repentance. And if he is aware of this need, he may, as a result, be able to reduce to a small but significant degree, the extent of his egocentricity. In short, the Barthian perspective reduces all problems to the result of sin, an inadequate view, I believe, which overlooks many important aspects of personality disturbance, and then compounds this inadequacy, especially in terms of pastoral counseling, by not allowing for the possibility of some degree of repentance in any but the fully awakened. In light of these points, I feel that the minister holding to this perspective is

likely to overlook real opportunities for constructive change in many of his counselees.

Thus I do not feel that Barth's concept of sin offers any really creative possibilities for pastoral counseling.

Niebuhr's Doctrine and Pastoral Counseling

I believe the later Niebuhr offers a much more creative meeting point for Christian faith and psychological insights. There is a flexibility to his position that allows for really significant interaction. Some of the important insights of men such as Rogers and Fromm can be combined with a Niebuhrian view of man while their extreme optimism about man's essential goodness is held in check by Niebuhr's insistence that while man may increase in creativity, he never escapes the taint of pride. So too can some of the penetrating conclusions of men such as Mowrer be used in conjunction with Christian faith, while extremes on this end of the spectrum can be held in check by Niebuhr's doctrine of grace. Thus, while Niebuhr often has been seen as the enemy of psychology, I believe that in fact he offers a creative meeting point for psychology and Christianity. His attacks have been leveled at the naivete and reductionism of so much of psychology. But his theology does not necessitate the rejection of, for example, the seven points I have argued that the minister needs to learn from psychology for effective pastoral counseling.

Within the Niebuhrian frame of reference, the minister can

approach a counselee with the initially tentative assumption that he has radical freedom and responsibility and practices egocentric behavior. Yet he can and should realize also that there are some persons whose selfhood is so undeveloped that they are simply incapable of deliberately sinful self-assertion, but rather take a life stance of "shrinking back," of inability to come to grips with the more than routine challenges and changes of life.

Normally, the process of physical maturation is accompanied by a growing depth of self-awareness, which makes possible radical freedom. But if, due primarily to environmental factors, this physical maturation is not accompanied by significant growth of self-consciousness, then the person involved has not yet reached the point where he can be looked upon as a responsible self.

Niebuhr, to my knowledge, does not deal directly with this problem, but there is nothing in his doctrine of man that would prohibit his accepting the concept of mature (meaning truly self-aware) selfhood as a prerequisite for full responsibility.

Indeed, I believe his doctrine of man requires and implicitly affirms this view. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that he would be most cautious in applying the concept of responsibility to the delinquent child.¹⁷ Niebuhr seems quite aware of the fact that environmental factors play a large role in the amount of responsibility that can reasonably be attributed to a person.

¹⁷ Niebuhr, The Self and the Dramas of History, p. 128.

However, I am sure Niebuhr would quickly warn that we must not generalize to the extent of classifying all persons who "shrink back" as predominantly undeveloped, non-responsible selves. There are persons with an appreciable amount of self-awareness who nevertheless consistently refuse to assert themselves creatively, who refuse to go forward toward new challenges and opportunities of growth. The reason for the hesitancy of some such persons may be due largely to potent inferiority feelings instilled in them through past experiences of inadequacy. If this is the case, the concept of sin does not adequately describe or explain the problem. What such persons need is supportive counseling. But there are also self-aware persons who "shrink back" because they like things the way they are. They prefer the security and comfort of what is to the challenge of what might be, even if remaining at their present level of existence is to their own ultimate detriment as well as to that of those around them. This "shrinking back" is a form of egocentricity. It is a manipulating attempt to keep things the way they are (i.e., to one's own advantage), and while the effort may not be obvious, it is real and sinful. (Incidentally, this is the type of behavior Barth labels as sloth, and I pointed out earlier in this chapter that I believe he would be more accurate in classifying this sin as a manifestation of egocentricity.)

What all these factors point to is the obligation upon the minister to treat each counselee as an individual with individual problems, and this approach is possible within the Niebuhrian

frame of reference. A minister sharing his view of man will tentatively assume, at the beginning of a counseling situation, that the counselee has radical freedom and responsibility, but will also be aware that not all persons fit equally into this category, and that the counselee before him conceivably could be one such person. Furthermore, he will realize that the counselee may be carrying a burden of painful inferiority feelings, or of false, unrealistic guilt (which, of course, can be closely related to feelings of inferiority and failure). And even in the counselee who, on the whole, demonstrates a degree of self-conscious maturity, there may be areas of his thinking and acting in which he is hampered with a real lack of awareness. Thus, the minister, if he is a sensitive person, will avoid making sweeping assumptions not founded on fact, but through dialogue with the counselee he will try to seek out the real feelings and motives of the counselee. And he will do this in order that he might guide that person to increasing self-awareness where such awareness is obviously inadequate, help him reduce his guilt feelings when they give every indication of being false and destructive, and encourage the development of his "ego strength" when he is crippled by inferiority feelings.

But still he will not overlook the fact that most persons do possess a degree of responsibility for the egotistic behavior they undoubtedly practice much of the time. Thus he will realize also that many guilt feelings are real, with objective references, and that in all likelihood in some areas of the counselee's living

he should be experiencing more guilt than he now experiences, unless he is one of those exceptions, with undeveloped selfhood. Tournier points out that it is as important to arouse an awareness of guilt in those who do not consciously feel it as to help people find relief through forgiveness for guilt when they do feel it. Men like Rogers and Fromm are unable to grasp the value and necessity of a sense of guilt and this is a point where Niebuhr offers a needed correction. From the perspective of his concept of sin, a sense of guilt is a necessary ingredient in life, for without it one would put no checks on his egotism.

It should be noted that it is only pushing this understanding of the importance of guilt to its logical conclusion to argue that unless there are valid reasons for feeling guilt, then there is no real meaning in existence, for there are no standards, no values, and everything is permissible and ultimately without worth. Thus guilt is not only necessary as a check on egotism, but also as an indication that there are values in life.

Consequently, if a counselor's goal were to remove all guilt feelings from his counselee, then his approach would have an air of the demonic about it. He would be, in effect, seeking to demolish any concept of right and wrong that the counselee might have. And if he should succeed, then the counselee would be caught in nihilism and meaninglessness, and the cure would be at least as bad as the sickness! Indeed if the counselor should have total "success," he would have helped to create, or at least to intensify, serious personality disorders in the counselee.

Again, the minister must be careful not to induce or to

increase false guilt, but he is, from the Niebuhrian perspective, obligated to awaken a sense of guilt in those who would seek to exonerate themselves from the taint of egocentricity in whatever form it might take. In fact, such persons, through the force of their conscience, undoubtedly do feel some guilt for their egotism, but it is repressed or explained away (which can be the same thing), and consequently is all the more dangerous to them and to others. Both Tournier and Mowrer point this out and stress the need to have such guilt brought out into awareness, that it might be dealt with. But always, the problem of guilt should be dealt with within the context of God's love that stands in judgment against sin but is eager to forgive when man sincerely repents.

The minister, then, if he holds to a Niebuhrian view of man, will approach each counselee as an individual with his own special problems, and he will realize that in this or that particular case sin and repentance may not be the most relevant factors. Sin and sickness, real and false guilt, are continually mixed together in man's predicaments and in any given problem one or the other factor may predominate. Nevertheless, the minister will enter into the counseling situation with the tentative assumption that the counselee has real self-transcendent freedom which he is inclined to use in an egocentric manner. And if the assumption of such freedom is borne out by the counseling dialogue, evidence of sinfulness in particular areas under discussion may become so convincing that it requires the attention of both

counselor and counselee.

There is one quite controversial assumption that must be made by the minister if he is going to hold to Niebuhr's view of man, and that is that direct confrontation may at times be necessary to lead a person to the point where he will face-up to his prideful self-assertion. But the minister must be extremely cautious in this confrontation, because, as the Christian faith has always said, only God can ultimately judge a human being. Tournier goes to great lengths in stressing that so often the minister deals only with externals and sits in judgment upon these externals, while actually not even attempting to grasp the underlying feelings and motives of the counselee.¹⁸ It is the motives that are important, at least in connection with the problem of sin, and in the last analysis only the counselee himself (if he possesses some insight) and God can have real access to these motives. Thus, the minister, in helping the counselee distinguish between false guilt and real guilt, walks on dangerous ground, ground that psychologists such as Rogers and Fromm do not feel he should be on in the first place! But walk on it he must, if he believes man does sinfully assert himself.

How such confrontation should take place varies, of course, with the counselee and his situation, but in all circumstances the minister should be a good listener and communicate real concern for the counselee. Only if these factors are present can

¹⁸Tournier, pp. 72-94.

constructive confrontation have much opportunity for success. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the minister cannot finally, ultimately judge whether a man's motives are sinful at a particular point. What the minister can do is help lead the counselee to a full awareness of the implications of his behavior if it has destructive aspects, and help him to search out and face his motives for such behavior. At this point the counselee may be reluctant to face the sinful aspects of some of his motives, and the minister must try to help him pass beyond this reluctance. He may be able to do this through confessing his own sinfulness, through admitting that in similar circumstances he has found egocentricity arising within himself. Tournier points out that such honest self-confession by the counselor often leads the counselee to a willingness to confess also, because he realizes that the minister is not his judge but is a fellow sinner also in need of God's mercy.¹⁹ But again, the minister may find it necessary to state simply that the counselee's behavior at a particular point seems to reflect prideful motives, explain why, and then let the counselee react. This approach does present the possibility of repression, but if the minister shows real concern and has listened intently, and if he makes clear that ultimately he is unqualified to say what the other person's motives are and can only try to help the counselee search out and face these motives, then this confrontation need not be repressive. The

¹⁹Tournier, pp. 84-85.

counselee may react self-defensively at first, but if the minister's concern is felt, the message may "sink-in." However, there always is the possibility that the counselee is so involved in his own egocentricity that he will not face it or its implications. In that case, the minister may lose the counselee, or at least have little effect upon him. But even with this person the minister can show concern and hope that sometime in the future the counselee will be open to his assistance.

Ideally, in pastoral counseling where the problem seems to involve an element of egocentricity, the minister helps the counselee to grasp the reality of God's love, which both shatters his sinful pride and supports his repentance with forgiving grace. For it is within the context of the presence of God's love that guilt and grace are most keenly felt. Such a goal is within the realm of possibility when the counselee is a sensitive Christian who practices an intense prayer life. This type of person has a deep penetrating consciousness of self in the presence of God's love. Hence he is aware of the fact that he is a sinner. Yet even he may be reluctant to face the evidences of pride involved in a particular problem under discussion, and then the minister may have to do a bit of prodding. But if there is a real sense of Christian love in the atmosphere of the counseling situation, it is entirely possible for this person to grasp his sinfulness and repent of it in the presence of what he knows to be not only the minister's love but God's love as well.

But this goal of leading the counselee to a conscious

confrontation with God often is not possible. The great majority of those with whom the minister must deal are either struggling to maintain a vague sense of awareness of God's presence or have no real awareness of it at all. With these, divine confrontation that makes guilt and grace so vivid is often beyond the realm of possibility. As I have tried to show, with such persons as these Barth's thinking becomes irrelevant, at least in terms of its application to pastoral counseling. But with Niebuhr's concepts of conscience and sin as egocentricity, there is a point of contact. We can still speak to these people in terms of egocentricity; we can still confront them with what appears to be their narrow self-interest. Although the shattering impact of confrontation with God's love may be missing, yet a significant degree of awareness of this excessive self-concern, exposed in the light of the Christian ethic, is possible, because there is some guilt arising from such selfishness in every person who possesses a degree of responsibility. And this awareness can lead to a significant degree of repentance, though this repentance may be, for the individual involved, more a form of regret and remorse than of religious repentance in the presence of God's love.

It must be pointed out in fairness to Niebuhr that he states quite clearly that only in conscious confrontation with God does one fully face the depth of his sinfulness. Yet his concept does leave room for the possibility of the counselee becoming aware of some significant aspects of his egocentricity

within the counseling situation even if he is not aware of confrontation with God.

However, we should not forget that the counseling session itself can be a real source of learning about such concepts as sin, guilt, and grace. As a counselee becomes aware of his excessive self-concern, there is perhaps opportunity presented to help him grasp the meaning of the Christian understanding of sin and guilt. And if we can communicate to him our Christian love and acceptance, we may be able to help him grasp what we mean when we speak of God's grace. Frankly, I think psychologists are right in saying that the use of religious resources can be repressive with some persons. But if the counseling is carried on in an atmosphere of genuine love, then the minister has an opportunity and an obligation to help the counselee relate the dynamics of this counseling to Christian concepts such as sin, repentance, grace, and redemption. He should not feel compelled to do this with every person he counsels, but he should be sensitive to those situations in which it is possible to relate the experiences of the counseling to Christian faith.

There is probably much more that could be said about relating Niebuhr's thought to pastoral counseling. I am not an expert in counseling and I have undoubtedly overlooked some important points and stated some incorrect ones. However, I hope that I have been able to communicate my belief that Niebuhr offers a creative meeting ground for psychology and Christianity, especially in relation to pastoral counseling. I think some of

the problems that beset the modern minister, problems which I tried to describe in the last chapter, could be solved or at least made less serious if psychologists and Christians would enter into more dialogue, using Niebuhr's thought as a meeting point. In my opinion Paul Tournier points to the fruitful rewards of such an approach. He has probably never read anything written by Niebuhr, but yet, he gives indication of holding to a concept of sin similar to that held by Niebuhr. The results, as reflected in his book, Guilt and Grace, are penetratingly relevant to both psychology and the Christian faith. His work makes me feel all the more strongly that a dialogue between psychology and Christianity, with special reference to Niebuhr's thought, would be to the advantage of both, and certainly would benefit those engaged in the practice of pastoral counseling.

Concluding Remarks

But after we have studied all that Niebuhr has to say and psychology has to offer, and have attempted to synthesize the two, we of course still find ourselves in difficulty, in terms of relating the concept of sin to pastoral counseling, because of the fact that to so many of our people sin and repentance are empty concepts totally unrelated to the guilt they often feel. I have argued that even with these Niebuhr has a relevancy. Yet we must face the fact that unless our people experience an awareness of God's presence and have an understanding in depth of the Christian faith, these concepts will remain rather vague for

many, who will simply repress their guilt or seek to explain it away through the numerous intellectual helps of modern culture. Thus there is an obligation placed upon the Church to do more than it is now doing to lead persons to deeper understanding of the faith and more meaningful communion with the Holy Spirit. The concepts of sin and grace must be dealt with in all aspects of Church life, not simply in counseling. What can we do? That is a hard question to answer. Certainly through sermons and church-school classes and small groups we can strive to create an impact of the Christian faith upon peoples' lives. And perhaps, too, we might, among other things, reinstitute some form of structured confession dealing specifically with sin and real guilt. The possibilities are many, and the challenge is great. We need today more than ever before to make Christians more self-aware within the context of God's love revealed in Christ, a love continually searching out our hearts in judgment and in forgiving grace. To the degree that Christians lack this peculiar form of self-awareness, the problem of relating the concepts of sin and grace to pastoral counseling is that much more intensified.

The challenge is before us then to help our people reach that point where they can proclaim with the Psalmist:

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord
imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

When I declared not my sin, my body
wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night thy hand was heavy
upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the
heat of summer.

I acknowledged my sin to thee,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions
to the Lord;"
then thou didst forgive the guilt of my
sin.²⁰

²⁰Psalm 32:1-5.

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W.R.D.